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Early Childhood Education:

Perceptions, Problems and Possibilities

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to provide evidence, based in historical and contemporary research, of the importance of early years education, not only in terms of academic achievement, but of social outcomes as well; to examine the perceptions of teachers in relationship to societal influences and the effects of such on the changing educational needs of the child; and to suggest possible elements for high quality programme development in the early years.

Section I attempts to set in context certain apparent key influences on the growth and development of early childhood education. Whilst the main focus of the thesis is a comparison of Britain and Canada, Section I also provides an international context by examining early years programmes in several other countries.

Section II addresses the critical nature of familial and community environments with respect to parents' initial involvement as their children's first teachers and their continued involvement in a partnership with schools. This section also discusses the importance of early intervention for children 'at risk' in the context of its broad benefits to society.

Section III deals with the methodology and data analysis of a survey of teachers in Britain and Canada. The survey, complemented by interviews with several of the respondents, was designed to gather perceptions and reflections from teachers.

Section IV identifies features of successful early childhood programs in terms of what appears to work according to current research and the perceptions of teachers. In addition, it provides illustrations of selected programmes in Canada and Britain that have incorporated many of these features.

Since societal changes identified in the thesis are urging educators and policy makers to re-examine their approach to early years provision, the last section suggests elements necessary for high quality early education programmes that will provide opportunities to maximise the individual potential of all children.

Introduction

'The early years are critical in laying the foundation for children to develop to their full potential and to be successful in school and later life.' (Kotlus, 1996)

Important decisions that affect the futures of our very young children are continually being made by policy makers. If these decisions are to be made in the best interests of the children and society as a whole, it is vital that the decision makers acknowledge that societal changes are necessitating a move toward providing both high quality care **and** education in the early years.

Dan Quayle, former vice-president of the United States, once said, rather foolishly, 'I am convinced that as things develop, we will see change.' Of course, the only thing we can be, and always have been, certain of **is** change. But some parts of our lives change faster than others. For example, the large proportion of mothers entering the workforce in the 1990s has occurred, in many countries, without corresponding increases in the provision of high quality care and education for children under the age of compulsory schooling. Changes in societal circumstances, lifestyles and needs, coupled with technological advances and the expansion of our knowledge base drive the need for changes in education (Bruner, 1974; Coombes, 1995). These changes increasingly point to the need to combine care and education in the early years.

As Burgess (1984, p 32) has stated '... personal experience in a social setting may help generate a research problem ...' and certainly, in my

instance, it was precisely my own experience in early years settings that initiated my interest in the effects of societal change on early childhood education and care. My professional roles as an early years consultant and teacher were instrumental in initiating my research into the importance of high quality early years provision. As a result of those experiences and my reflections on change, I was able to identify gaps in existing early years provision. In addition, I came to an awareness that teachers are confronted, daily, with problems created by changes in society.

These problems, I believed, could be addressed by identifying what changes teachers perceive in children as they begin pre-school and early school experiences. I believed these perceptions would result in the identification of certain elements of programming that could be considered essential in the provision of quality learning experiences for children in the early years.

I looked for evidence concerning the growing recognition of the importance of providing good quality early childhood education and care by briefly tracing the historical development of early years programmes and outlining current research and practice, but more especially by examining, from a broadly comparative perspective (notably concentrating on Canada and Britain), the views of those who are at the very heart of early childhood provision, the teachers themselves.

Although many politicians continue to question the validity of such evidence, questioning the view that key attitudes and conceptual

understandings, particularly in the development of social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills, occur in the first few years of life, that evidence can be found, in abundance, not only in the historical and developmental roots of early childhood education and in the provision of forward looking countries in Europe and North America, but in well documented research projects (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1994; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Bryant and Ramey, 1987). Teachers' voices are also crucial since teachers see, daily, how children develop and are in a position to identify and monitor changing factors in their pupils' lives which may enhance or impede learning.

The Problem

Changing times bring changing needs and changing needs require different services. The rate of change in many post- industrial societies has, in part, altered the traditional concept of the family and its roles and initiated a clear need to redefine education for a new generation of young children. Families have become more mobile due, not only to the ease of transportation within and between countries, but to economic restructuring, technological change and successive recessions resulting in job instability (Roehler Institute, 1993). More mothers have entered the workforce, both for personal and economic reasons. Increasingly families are led by single parents or dual earners. The relative ease of birth control has resulted in smaller families. These changes all impact on the educational needs of children as out-of-family care becomes more and more necessary in the early years.

Elkind (1995, p. 8) points out '***The school is the mirror of society and of the family. As society and the family change, so too must the***

school.' Since children are often in care earlier, the traditional family influences on pre-school language development and on experiences upon which to build future learning may, in many cases, have a reduced effect. Whilst policy makers equivocate, educators and researchers in education have long acknowledged the importance of the early years of childhood in providing a firm basis for future learning.

Traditionally in most countries of the world, care and education in early childhood have been viewed as two separate services. Where national funding was provided such funding was normally administered by two separate departments of government: care generally coming under the portfolio of the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Social Services, and education under the Ministry of Education. Changes in society (and, to a lesser extent, social and developmental changes in the child) have increasingly resulted in the need to view education and care as vitally interrelated. Such factors as increased mobility, changes in traditional family structure, socio-economic conditions and a preponderance of mothers joining the workforce are forcing educators and policy makers to re-examine their approach to traditional provision of care and education in the early years. It would appear that services are now becoming more beneficial and effective if they are included together under the umbrella of one ministry.

OECD (1982, p 169) stated that

"the considerable emotional involvement in children (who have become rarer) is shown, among other things, in the extension of the educational function".

But there is more than emotion involved when one considers the total needs of these 'rarities', who are not only our children, but our future. It is no longer enough to provide care in the early years; it is clear that education has, of necessity, become a component of care. In addition, the need for the types of early years settings that were traditionally reserved for the middle and upper classes who could afford them, is now, for various reasons, spreading through the working class.

"So much remains to be done to reach even the minimum goal of guaranteeing all children appropriate conditions to their development" *(OECD, op cit. p 171).*

Comparing the socio-political context of early childhood education in North America and Europe one may be left with the impression that changes in government policies towards early childhood education on both continents may sometimes threaten to reduce the quality and accessibility of early years education. This comes at a time when research findings on its benefits have never been more positive. For example, as attempts are made to deal with economic deficits, education and care become 'ideal' targets for reduction in government financial support, especially in countries espousing ideologies and beliefs concerning the rightness of 'market-force' economies. However, current research into many aspects of family structure, into issues concerned with quality and type of provision and into aspects of equality of opportunity, access and gender indicate that governments need to examine funding and programming policies to ensure that all children and families are guaranteed equal access to care and education regardless of socio-economic status. Additionally, research (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1994; Sylva, 1994a) suggests that it is the broader benefits to society, in terms of raising self-esteem, lowering

the chances of later school failure and 'drop out', reducing crime, reducing the risk of child abuse and, reducing the need for social services assistance, that provide evidence for the cost-effectiveness of ensuring appropriate early childhood education and care.

Many countries, in recognition of the importance of appropriate provision, both in care and in education, have adopted various financial and programming strategies designed to meet the changing needs of today's children. Other countries, or states within countries, seem to have buried their heads in the sand and continue to ignore the evidence that support in the early years can often reduce the need for educational remediation and/or financial and judicial strains on society in later years.

It is this dilemma, faced by very young children and their families, particularly in parts of Canada and Britain, that forms the foundation for this thesis. It is a well-known fact, evidenced in the historical roots of early years education and in research (discussed further on in this thesis) focusing on early education, that early intervention can, at the very least, reduce the effects of disadvantage and provide a firmer foundation for later learning. The massive changes in societal expectations and traditions have necessitated a need to provide care and education much earlier than in the past, not only for those children considered to be 'at risk', but for children from all walks of life.

The position I attempt to explore in this thesis contextualises certain more specific issues and problems (which follow later). It is that high quality early childhood education and care appear to be accepted as

important for later learning (both social and academic). This message is repeated in the discourse of diverse disciplines, such as psychology, health care and sociology, is frequently cited in educational and social policy documents in many countries, lies at the heart of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child and is taken as an important 'mantra' by many of those who regularly work in the field. Many of the latter appear to see early childhood education and care as in need of even more serious recognition, however. If it IS 'the foundation' it is purported to be, they argue, where is the evidence in terms of committed money, status and attention?

The historical literature and the research that will be cited throughout the thesis relate to those more specific questions, but ALL occur within the context of the generic debate and its assumptions. It is intended that research into the wider context, more specifically of the roughly matched (though possessed of somewhat different systems of local responsibility) should yield interesting comparisons of teachers' perspectives. These will not be 'cross-cultural' comparisons, but used in Kandel's terms in a comparative style to illuminate by contrast, similarity or example, whilst acknowledging that the small samples of teachers are in different settings and operate within relatively different cultures. Specific questions asked of the teachers are designed to open up the 'finer grain' of that culture and to see just what the preoccupations and perceptions of those early years teachers are.

Knowing that the rhetoric is strong in both countries concerning the need for developmentally appropriate practice (Alberta Education, 1984; New Brunswick Department of Education, 1992; Metropolitan

Borough of Wirral, 1993; Cheshire County Council, 1993; Gammage and Meighan, 1995; Bertram and Pascal, 1995), one might expect to find remarkable similarities in viewpoint. Moreover, it is acknowledged, (from hearsay and general 'in the field' experience) that early years teachers in both countries commonly comment on various experiences which children do or do not have on entering school or kindergarten. Thus, exploration of the context in a genuinely comparative style (that is by being acutely aware of cultural difference and history, as well as similarity) forms a vital and major 'leit-motif' to the whole study.

Purpose of the Study

One of my prime concerns was to find out whether or not teachers in Britain and Canada shared a certain set of attitudes and beliefs about the essential nature of high quality early childhood education and care. The views of teachers have not always figured highly in political decisions regarding early childhood provision, and so, in this thesis, the core field work will examine their views, and use them, along with other evidence, in an attempt to support the concept of early and continued provision of high quality education for very young children.

Second, I wanted to examine teachers' perceptions of early years education as a foundation for children's later learning. Did teachers have specific views about its importance as a foundation? Did teachers perceive it as 'essential' if one were to maximise opportunities later in childhood by ensuring high quality early years programmes? Although, children's lives have changed due to the factors mentioned previously in this chapter, their need for high quality early childhood

education and care continues to figure significantly as an important component of their educational journey (Abbott and Rodger, 1994; OECD, 1995).

A third purpose of the study was to attempt to identify the components of early childhood programmes that appear, in the perceptions of the participating teachers, in recent research and literature and in the historical roots of early childhood education, to make a significant contribution to the effectiveness and quality of the programmes. Was it possible to identify actual components of early childhood programmes that appeared regularly in the perceptions of teachers?

Assumptions

1. Early years teachers share similar interpretations of concepts related to early childhood education such as the concept of 'readiness' and 'quality' provision. These are discussed in more detail in this section and in the methodology chapter.

2. Early years teachers share similar beliefs about how young children learn. This assumption is rooted in my own experience and practice and in similarities in indicators of appropriate and effective practice (OECD, 1995; Abbott and Rodger, 1994; NAEYC, 1988; 1991).

3. Teachers' philosophical beliefs are related to the historical roots of early childhood education. A further assumption in this regard is that

these beliefs may be a result of similarities in the education and training of the teachers.

4. The participating teachers answered truthfully on the questionnaires and during the interviews. The teachers had nothing to lose for their truthfulness and most appeared anxious to contribute to a study whose aim was to highlight the importance of high quality early childhood education.

Definitions

Several term, used throughout this thesis, warrant defining. **Early childhood** and **readiness** are terms that have been frequently used in the context of early years education. **Quality** is a relatively new term, but one that will be used extensively throughout the latter portion of the thesis. Definitions for the purpose of the thesis follow.

1. Although the years of **'early childhood'** may include the years from birth to eight, and are often referred to in different groupings in different countries, for the purpose of this study, 'early childhood' and the 'early years' will be assumed to encompass the years from two and one half to eight. This thesis is concerned, for the most part, with educational provision in the early years, but, from time to time, it will be relevant to refer to children in later stages of schooling in order to make a particular point.

2. The concept of **'readiness'** as used in the thesis refers to the experiential opportunities and intellectual stimulation that children may have experienced prior to entering formal or informal educational institutions. Boyer (1992, p 7) identifies the key dimensions of kindergarten readiness to be 'physical well-being, social confidence, emotional maturity, language richness, general knowledge and moral awareness'. Although the term will be used frequently throughout the response section, later in the thesis, in relation to teachers' perceptions, it is not the intent of the thesis to discuss the concept of 'readiness' or degrees of it.

'Readiness' was, in my opinion, a term that teachers in both countries would understand and could refer to as an indicator of the learning that occurs before children enter either pre-school situations or their first years of formal schooling. Teachers who participated in the study were asked to provide their perceptions, not only of what they considered to be readiness skills, but whether or not these skills were apparent in the children and what may have affected the development of these skills. Their responses are discussed in Section III.

3. **'Quality'** is currently the focus of many discussions surrounding early years education (and often those pertaining to education in the later years, as well). However, it is a concept not easily defined. Its meaning will depend, to a great extent, upon the experience, culture

and values of those defining the concept. Moss and Pence (1995, p 2) describe quality in early childhood programmes as '... the adoption of an essentially holistic approach...' which includes an understanding of '... the underlying dynamics of a particular service' and the extent to which the service meets its goals and objectives. Further discussion on the elusiveness of defining this concept can be found in Section IV.

There appear to be certain elements of programmes which indicate quality. The teachers in the study have identified elements that, in their experiences and perceptions, quite possibly contribute to high quality early childhood programmes. Their perceptions are discussed in Section III. In addition, research has identified critical factors which may enhance the quality of learning in the early years and these are discussed in Sections II and IV.

Organisation of the Thesis

Section I attempts to set the context of early childhood education in terms of its historical roots and the influence early theologians, philosophers, educators and researchers may have had on early childhood provision in the twentieth century. It is not the purpose of this study to provide an in depth analysis of each author deemed to have influenced the roots of early childhood education, but to identify certain philosophical beliefs that directly relate to elements of early years programmes that are perceived to be indicative of high quality, effective provision.

In addition, this section provides an international perspective on early childhood education, by briefly describing the provision in selected countries of Europe and North America. These countries, in various ways, are attempting to recognize the importance of the early years and to provide appropriate and accessible provision. The section concludes with a more concentrated focus on Canada and Britain, since these are the countries with which this thesis is mainly concerned.

The countries, each of which appear to be making an attempt to meet the educational needs of its very young citizens, were selected for reasons explained in Chapter 2. But, in addition to some commonalities, each country has an unique contribution to make to discussions of the increasingly global influences surrounding the issue of early childhood education. **Italy** has, of course, bequeathed the ideas of Maria Montessori. **France** has the honour of providing state funded early years provision in the *Ecoles Maternelles* for over one hundred years. **Belgium** also provides state funded *Ecoles Maternelles* and I was able add a personal interpretation from my recent (1995) attendance at the OECD conference concerned with combatting school failure which was held in Brussels and included visits to several schools in the area. **Denmark, Sweden and Spain** appeared to me, from recent readings, to be striving to provide quality early years programmes. **Germany** is attempting to solve difficulties which have arisen due to the diversity of early years provision prior to the removal of the Berlin Wall. Finally, the **USA** appears to have a strong influence on the developments of early years programmes in many countries due to the research findings of such projects as Head Start

and the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Project, as well as the research and publications of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

From an examination of the literature, it is apparent that the quality of learning experiences in the early years is dependent upon certain critical factors (possibly above all others). Section II examines the impact of a positive self-esteem on children's learning potential, addresses the importance of early intervention (and its potential to reduce the effects of genetic or environmental factors which may impede learning) and the importance of parents' initial involvement as their children's first teachers. The importance of language development as a basis for children to make meaning of new experiences and the vital role that the family plays in language learning is also considered. The section concludes with a focus on the importance of establishing effective partnerships with schools- partnerships that include the school, the children, the families, the communities and the business sector and which enhance opportunities for children's later learning.

Since teachers are significant stakeholders in the education of young children, Section III deals with the methodology and data analysis of a survey of and interviews with teachers in Canada and Britain regarding their perceptions about change in children's learning needs and elements of programming that may enhance these needs. In addition, Section III discusses the strengths and weaknesses of comparative methodology in relation to the tendency of some policy makers to make crude assumptions about the value of transfer of methodology, without sufficient examination of culture (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996).

My search was for answers to questions that had arisen, in my mind, pertaining to teachers' perceptions regarding the need for appropriate provision in the early years, particularly in the face of societal change. Entwined in their perceptions were, I discovered, political, economic and socio-psychological aspects of early childhood education. All participating teachers completed surveys and a smaller group of the respondents also consented to personal interviews. The survey was designed to gather teachers' perceptions regarding areas of concern in relation to skills and attitudes (or the lack thereof) with which children enter school and reflections on factors contributing to these. The interviews were designed to elicit information in the following areas:

1. Whether there are any perceived effects of maternal employment on the children

2. Whether government funding for pre-school provision is thought to be important

3. Problems which might arise if governments reduce funding for early years education

4. Whether early learning matters

5. What constitutes the nature of good teaching practice

6. How a universal entitlement to quality early learning might best be provided

Section IV focuses on features of successful early intervention programmes. This section identifies five areas (developmentally appropriate programming, setting appropriate goals, appropriate assessment, appropriate teacher training and education and effective partnerships) that are commonly associated with effective programmes and provides support from practitioners (including the teachers

involved in the survey and the interviews) and researchers. In addition, several successful programmes in Europe and North America are discussed in order to illustrate attempts to provide effective early years education.

Finally, since societal factors of increased mobility, changes in traditional family structures, socio-economic conditions and more mothers joining the workforce are forcing educators and policy makers to re-examine traditional early years provision, the last section attempts to identify critical factors that have been discussed in the thesis and that need addressing if high quality care and education are to be universally accessible.

Section I: Children and Education: Beliefs and Context

'***The first approach in understanding the nature and development of children and their range of individual differences is historical'*** (Connell, Debus and Niblett, 1967).

In researching the historical aspects of education and the contributions made by educators, philosophers, theologians and researchers over the years, it became clear that such a wealth of available information could result in an over-lengthy thesis developing simply from comparing some of the principal philosophies. Thus, from the outset, there was a need to be parsimonious and to separate and summarise only those who, *a priori*, appeared to me, to have an obvious impact on early childhood educators and in whose philosophies much of the theory behind intervention in modern early childhood education appears to be rooted. The purpose of the historical review, then, will be to support the assertion that the early years are important in education and to enhance my own knowledge of what has happened in the past with respect to early years education.

I begin Chapter 1 of this section with a focus on certain of the Puritans since, although their writings certainly emphasised the importance of family influence as a basis for formal school experiences, their outlook towards children was generally one of "adult knows best", with little recognition of the special learning needs of early childhood and with the major role of fathers being that of strict disciplinarian, whilst the mothers provided the soft, nurturing aspect of parenting. John Robinson wrote, in 1628, that fathers corrected the severity of the mothers' indulgences of their

children's behavior, but also gave "***virtue and good manners by their greater wisdom and authority.***" (Greven, 1973, p 11).

Although the focus remained on the **family** as a significant contributor to the formation of perceptions, Horace Bushnell, writing in 1847, began to show a more liberal view, in contrast to the strict severity of the Puritans. Bushnell wrote that, due to just "being" in the family, the child was naturally open to environmental and familial impressions that affected character formation: "***Meantime, he is open to impressions from everything he sees. His character is forming, under a principle not of choice, but of nurture.***" (Greven, p 158). It appears to me that there was a change here, a shift from a conceptualisation of the child as a miniature adult to a recognition that child development is a gradual process of unfolding, affected by experiences within the family and the community and by opportunities to engage in meaningful activities and to develop language skills.

Pestalozzi entered the educational scene in the 1800's. Many writers agree (and Froebel acknowledges) that his work set the stage not only for Froebel but later for Montessori. He recognised and provided opportunities for developing a new and fundamental phase in children's growth: a phase that required concrete, meaningful experiences with language, form and number as prerequisites to higher order thinking. (Rusk, 1933). The outcome of education, Pestalozzi maintained, was "***not perfection in the accomplishments of the school... but a preparation for independent action.***" (Rusk, op cit. p 439). Traditional methods of

teaching through presentation of facts and rote memorisation would not facilitate the development of such an important phase in a child's life.

As one of Pestalozzi's students, Froebel reiterated the beliefs of his mentor- that childhood was a phase of life important in its own right. Childhood was to lay the foundation for building the whole adult, and as such, ***"the more richly it was experienced, the more strongly the adult phase could be entered.***" (Bruce, 1987). Whilst retaining his belief in the influence of the family, Froebel stressed the importance of the early years in education, and ***"saw the school and kindergarten as socially significant institutions, fostering the emergence of individuality through the experience of group relationships and activities.***" (Curtis and Boultwood, 1953, p 366).

Montessori embraced the theory that childhood was a critical stage and carried the notion of its importance into the twentieth century. She continued to build on the foundations of a child-centred educational program, begun by Pestalozzi and Froebel, but raised the developmental pedagogy to the next level and focused on developing cognition through her observations of how children learn (DeVries and Kholberg, 1990). She did not approve of stimulating the child's imagination through the use of fantasy, but endeavoured to promote learning through reality. Her scientific background led her to the assumption that, whilst the arts and religion were important and required creative imaginative fancies, the modern technology that her students needed to learn was rooted in scientific research (Curtis and Boultwood, 1953).

These early explorers in the field of early childhood education had a profound effect on modern educators and, indeed, continue to do so. Chapter 2 will provide illustrations of current early childhood practice in Europe and North America. For example, Montessori's impact on modern early childhood programming is evidenced by the 1994 orientation materials given to parents who are considering the Lethbridge Montessori School in Alberta for their children. The programme is based on Montessori's four principles of absorbent minds, sensitive periods, a prepared environment and the attitudes of the adults. The goals of the programme cite "Practical Life" as "the most important area of the classroom". The programme attempts to teach children, as Montessori did," order, coordination, concentration and independence". Additional goals focus on sensorial education, language and mathematics skills through the use of didactic materials. Parent involvement is not neglected as parents are encouraged to serve on the advisory board, assist in the classroom and are provided with selected readings on child development. Montessori would have certainly approved of the dedication to and continuation of her method.

Contemporary, as well as historical, figures have identified critical factors that influence the quality of learning experiences in the early years. Building on the observations and philosophies of early writers in the field, John Holt's (1983) description of how children learn, Ernest Boyer's (1991) seven steps for success in children's learning and the description by King et al (1994) of quality early years programming support not only each other but the rest of

modern early childhood educators in identifying crucial factors that ensure all children are offered opportunities to develop to their maximum potential. Amongst these factors are parents' initial involvement as first teachers and their continued involvement in partnerships with schools. These and other associated factors, such as the importance of language development as a basis for making meaning of new experiences and the diversity of children's rates of development, environmental backgrounds and interests, are recognised by educators as important facets in the development of intervention programmes not only for children 'at risk' but for quality early years programmes in general.

Chapter 1 of this section focusses on the contributions made to early childhood education by the educators cited in the previous pages and by others concerned with providing the best possible learning environment for young children. Chapter 2 describes early childhood provision in several European and North American countries, many of them incorporating some or all of the factors mentioned above.

Chapter 1: An Historical Perspective on Early Childhood Education

'And the first step, as you know, is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when they are taking shape and when any impression we chose to make leaves a permanent mark.' (Plato, *The Republic*)

In order to build a relevant picture of children's learning, educators and researchers have, in addition to their own investigations and observations, relied on information gathered by early writers in the field of education. Whilst these writers may not have been directly concerned with early childhood education, per se, one can often find the seeds of modern child development theories in the convictions and philosophies of writers and educators of past centuries. Their observations highlighted, in many cases, the critical importance of the influences and experiences of the early years as foundations for future learning. Greven (1973) states that the "***historical background of childhood and family is vital to any understanding of the history of education***", for we are not unique today in recognizing the significance of the early years and their impact on future success.

Greven concentrates on the contributions made by the influential theological writers of England and America from the early 1600's to the mid-1800s. Although these writers were mainly concerned with theological philosophy and discipline within the family, they were consistent in emphasising the importance of the early years and their impact on learning. In 1628, John Robinson, a minister with particular influence upon the Puritan Separatists who sailed to New England,

stressed in his writings that:

"***Children, in their first days have the greater benefit of a good mother...receiving their first impressions from them.***"(Greven, p 11).

Robinson's thoughts on the importance of the first impressions that children received in the home were reinforced, in 1693, by John Locke's words as he wrote *Some Thoughts concerning Education* which emphasised "natural methods of teaching" instead of the strict discipline advocated by the theologians of the day.

"... we have reason to conclude that great care is to be had of the forming of children's minds, and giving them that seasoning early, which shall influence their lives always after."(Greven, p 19).

Whilst not discounting the necessity of a "friendly" parental authority, Locke advocated that ***"Playing and childish actions are to be left perfectly free and unrestrained"***(Curtis and Boultwood, 1953, p. 233). He urged parents and educators to use gentle kindness and soft words of admonition, to recognise the importance of play in children's learning and to treat each child as an individual. It was vital, according to Locke, to observe the uniqueness of every child and then, based on those observations, to select teaching strategies most suited to that particular child.

About the middle of the seventeenth century, Rousseau's influence on the philosophy of education began. Initially, he followed Locke's thoughts about education but exposure to the ideas of others who moved in the circles of philosophy and politics led him to become more reflective and develop innovative educational ideas of his own.

In 1762, with the publication of *Emile,* Rousseau's ideas came into the public eye. He '*...viewed humans as essentially good with a natural curiosity. He felt that as a distinct and unique part of humanness, childhood should be valued for itself and recognised as different from adulthood'* (Butt, 1978, p 74). Rousseau agreed with Locke that children were unique individuals, but he went further and argued that children had unique ways of seeing, hearing and thinking that separated them from the way adults saw, heard and thought. Rousseau maintained that children should be provided with an education that was meaningful and personal to the young learners. Not only must educators take this into account, but they must also pay heed to the differences of sex, age and individuality in each child.

It was the lessons of experience, Rousseau believed, that developed the original nature of the child. Children, he said, learn through interactions with their environment, but play encompasses a large part of those interactions. Hence, Rousseau believed, learning occurred through play.

Rousseau did not neglect to emphasise the impact that the family had on the education of young children. He held that education began at birth and the best education could be found within the family.

'The family stands midway between nature and society and there, better than anywhere else, the child can develop his individual

powers with the minimum of restraint.' (Boyd and King, 1995, p 298)

It is reasonable to assume that Rousseau influenced the educators and who followed him. His ideas generated a great deal of interest in the uniqueness of providing education in early childhood. These ideas, radical though they were in the 1760s, particularly regarding the uniqueness of each child and the importance of learning through play, today, form the very basis of developmentally appropriate programming.

By 1833, when New England Congregationalist minister John Abbott, wrote *The Mother at Home*, praising the importance of mothers in the lives of their children, the focus of the community was directed to the nursery with these words:

"... the truth is daily coming more distinctly before the public, that the influence which is exerted upon the mind during the first eight or ten years of existence in a great degree guides the destinies of that mind for time and eternity." (Greven, p 115).

Abbott endeavoured to alert parents and the community to the importance of the powerful influences that were to be found in the familial life of early childhood.

"***And as the mother is the guardian and guide of the early years of life, from her goes the most powerful influence in the formation of the character of man... What impressions can be more strong, and more lasting, than those received upon the mind in the freshness and susceptibility of youth.***" (Greven, p 115).

Fifteen years later, Horace Bushnell, a Congregationalist minister from Connecticut whose liberal views of education concurred more closely to the gentleness of Locke than to the strict severity of the Puritans

wrote about the impact of the family and community on the child's early education. Just the fact of "being", Bushnell pointed out, in the environment of the community and of the family, contributed to the shaping of the child in preparation for the person he would eventually become.

The Puritan ideas regarding the need to provide supportive family experiences in the early years, and to build on those as formal schooling begins, continue to influence researchers and educators today, even as they influenced the Pilgrim immigrants in the New World. The impact of educators who have worked with children throughout history are found in today's principles of child development and their relationship to educational programs. The vision of an as yet unended staircase can provide an interesting picture of the influence each of the early educators and philosophers have had upon the developing theory of how children learn. Chomsky (1986, pp. xix-xx) cites Alfred North Whitehead's proposition that "***every step or process in the universe involves both effects from past situations and the anticipation for future potentialities***." He goes on to say that one can assume, that ***"the course of the universe results from a multiple and never-ending complex of steps developing one out of the other."*** As strategies are tried and philosophies developed, they provide a starting point for future educators in pursuit of the most appropriate ways to teach young children. In building such a staircase, the bottom landing can be left to the Puritan theologians. As one proceeds up the stairway, the influence of successive educators and psychologists becomes apparent as they explored what had been previously done, constructed

new theories and methods and communicated to those who continued to be concerned with early childhood education.

Curtis and Boultwood (1953 p 304) describe Johann Pestalozzi as "***an original thinker and experimenter owing little to the inspiration of his predecessors in pedagogy***", but it may well be that he felt some of the influence of the Puritan writers as he was developing his own theories on the importance of the early years. In addition, there is little doubt that Rousseau had a profound impact on Pestalozzi's thinking (Boyd and King, 1995).

Pestalozzi also relied upon his instinct regarding the ways to educate children and, drawing upon his experiences and observations with his own children, came to understand the importance of learning in an active and meaningful context. He did not establish a **method** or definite plan for the organization of learning in his schools, but his ideas did have an impact on future educators, particularly Froebel, who was to follow Pestalozzi's footsteps up the staircase. Pestalozzi's Swiss schools were established mainly to meet the needs of children from underprivileged homes. Whilst Pestalozzi's interpretations of the programs used in his schools did not include the term "early intervention", he was well aware of the importance of education in the early years. In a sense, his schools of the late 1700's and early 1800's **were** intervention programs, as Pestalozzi felt that those children who attended had, in some ways, been deprived of natural experiences and that teachers could intervene to provide the needed bases for future learning. His aim was to treat each child as an individual, hoping that

every child should

'*... feel within himself a consciousness of his own powers, to give an exact account of the lessons in which he is the author and inventor, having appropriated to himself the ideas placed before him and the problems which are presented to him and to exclaim ' I have found it! This is the solution I sought.' "* (Rusk, 1933, p.30)

Pestalozzi held what might be termed a "classic maturationist" view, that the child's whole development (intellectual, moral and physical) was vital (King et al. 1994) and that opportunities for developing all these must be included in the curriculum. Caring teachers who understood the particular needs of each child were to teach, not only intellectual facts, but provide practical, concrete activities as well. Instead of having his students learn by rote memorisation, Pestalozzi advocated moving learning slowly from the concrete to the abstract, using objects and interactive materials.

One of Pestalozzi's chief concerns was that public education should address the circumstances of the families it served and the environment from which the children came, lest education "***lead to an artificial and methodological dwarfing of humanity***" (Broman, 1982). In spite of his feelings about dehumanizing public education, perhaps Pestalozzi felt that a direct explanation of his ideas, plans and intentions in his schools would, in fact, disallow flexibility and detract from the rights of the children to interact with the environment in the ways that he felt would be of particular benefit to them. Instead, his philosophy was reflected through the experience of others in the stories he wrote. In *Leonard and Gertrude,* it is through Gertrude that ***"the leader of the village came to realise that the proper education of the child was the***

only way of bringing about reform and improvement" (Curtis and Boultwood, 1953, p. 312) in society.

Despite the fact that Pestalozzi established his schools for children who for the most part were from disadvantaged homes, his realization that "***the first moment of a child's education is the moment of...birth***" (Heafford, 1967) has provided the groundwork for many of today's educators concerned with early intervention. He stressed that the first years of childhood spent in the security of the family and home were equally as important in the process of education as the ensuing years of formal schooling. A mother's instinct provided the basis for teaching her children and for providing the first experiences upon which to build future knowledge in the school years. Pestalozzi felt that without this prior building of experiences, the child's capacity for learning would be significantly reduced. Pestalozzi used his own home as a facility for his first school and was successful in appealing to the "friends and benefactors of humanity" for funds to continue when his own ran out. Unfortunately, he lost the school when he could not compete against the interference of the parents of the children who spread rumours about the school and encouraged their offspring to run away and return to their old habits.

Although Pestalozzi did not construct an explicit theory of child development, he did produce, in addition to newspaper and journal articles and books explaining his philosophy of the impact of early education on later life, some books on instruction in mathematics. Fully aware of the home influences, he also published a guide for mothers to help their young children learn to observe and think. These

books encouraged active engagement with the environment as Pestalozzi was convinced of "***the child's power to learn through the known and the seen, for he had discovered how empty and useless their earlier learning-' one sided letter-knowledge'- was to his pupils***"(Curtis and Boultwood, p. 315). In 1805, Pestalozzi, finally having achieved fame and respect as an educator, opened his Yverdun institute to researchers and educators from all over Europe. They came to observe teaching, to attend research methods courses and to train as teachers, taking away Pestalozzi's educational ideas for dissemination across Europe. Pestalozzi did not advertise his schools as intervention programs, but, in recognising the impact of personal experience in learning, he stressed that "***...the ultimate end of education is not perfection in the accomplishments of the school...but a preparation for independent action***."(Rusk, p 43).

Those who followed Pestalozzi were influenced by his reflections on his observations as a teacher and a parent and by the experiential bases of his schools. Friedrich Froebel visited the institute at Yverdun and learned from his involvement as a tutor there. He embraced Pestalozzi's principles in the publication of his philosophy for teaching young children, *The Education of Man,* and, in turn, has had a major impact on early years education today. His assertion echoed Pestalozzi's, that childhood is a stage of life that is important in **its own right.** Froebel's maturationist view echoed that of Pestalozzi. He believed that, given the proper nourishment and psychological stimulation, children would achieve each stage of development in a pre-determined sequence. The environment would influence only the ease with which each stage unfolded and the extent to which it

unfolded (King et al. 1994). Children, Froebel felt, needed a rich environment early in their lives in order to prepare them more strongly for their adult lives (Bruce, 1987). Childhood was to lay the foundation for the building of the whole life that was to follow. Since Froebel considered kindergarten to be such an essential step in the process of education, lack of careful attention to needs specific to this important stage of life could, he felt, hamper progress in later years (Broman, 1982, p. 26).

Froebel opened his first school in 1816 and, as did Pestalozzi, stressed that children needed to be active and engage in meaningful activities that could be extended, dependent upon their individual interests. His realisation that it was disadvantaged children, with parents unable to pay high tuition fees, who needed the activity-based program he was offering probably contributed to the financial difficulties with which his school was beset. Eventually, as he became more and more aware of the critical nature of early years education, he turned his school over to a colleague and established, in 1835, a teacher training institute. He wanted to instill in new teachers, a commitment to young children, and an acceptance of his philosophy that the early stages of education were vitally important in ensuring future, co-operative and productive citizens.

As the "Father of Kindergarten", Froebel used the metaphor of a garden in describing his schools, and in fact, carried it further in describing the interactive experiences of his students, and most particularly play, as "the germinal leaves of all later life" (Broman, 1982, p 26). His notion of kindergarten, emphasising nature, the

community and the family, brought these three together to meet the needs of the whole child in this most important phase of life.

An aura of spirituality pervaded Froebel's work. His drive to meet the educational needs of the child was complemented by his attention to the spiritual and moral aspect of development (Bruce, 1987). Froebel believed that nature and man were creations of God (Liebschner, 1991). He extended this belief into a vision of unity, resulting in his contention that the whole child must be unified by putting equal emphasis on the development of physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of growth. The unifying force was play. Froebel "***saw play as a means by which the child maintains the wholeness of his/her experiences***." (Bruce, 1987, p 13).

Froebel developed a series of "Gifts" for his students and these carried on his theme of unity in life. These manipulative learning materials were designed, not only to encourage the children to observe and compare the relationships of the physical properties of form, colour, shape and size of various geometric models, but to mediate between ***"two opposing forces, the natural and spiritual, emotional and intellectual***" (Bruce, op cit p 13). The Gifts were presented to the children in a specific order: first a soft sphere, next a cube, a cylinder and a wooden sphere and finally four blocks that interconnected to become a whole. Only after being presented to the children as a whole were these blocks broken down into parts - just as the child's education began as a whole that preceded the parts in later education. In addition to exploring the physical properties of the Gifts, Froebel reasoned that by putting the various components of the Gifts together, the children

were developing fine motor control. Whilst Froebel emphasised the fine motor component of coordination at a stage that was perhaps too early in the development of most of his students, he did not neglect large muscle skills and ensured that active games, movement plays and gardening involving gross motor movement, were also included in the daily activities.

Froebel developed his philosophy, thatchildren learn holistically, through his observation of them. He built upon the "spontaneous, self-sustaining nature" (Evans, 1971) of children as he offered his students the use of manipulative, educational materials and musical activities and games, capitalising on the their natural tendencies to play and dance with each other as he sought to encourage their imaginations. Froebel's child-centered philosophy of development, that is, developing the whole child with an emphasis on the spontaneity and value of play, continues in most early childhood education programmes today.

In France, in the 1800s, although he concentrated on providing intervention programs for children with mental handicaps, Jean-Marc Itard, too, was influential with his techniques and philosophy in providing impetus for future educationists and psychologists as they developed their own early learning programs. Itard's methods of trying to teach children who were "feebleminded" and his more famous work with the Wild Boy of Aveyrnon (Shattuk, 1980) were extremely appealing to Maria Montessori when she began her work, in 1898, as Director of a special school for handicapped children in Rome. Her interest in Itard's methods of working with special needs children prompted the use of some of his techniques in her own work, and, that

work, then, led her to presume that the approach used with these children would also have value for those from impoverished backgrounds. She embarked on a mission of intervention to provide a suitable educational program for disadvantaged children in hopes of producing productive, cooperative citizens. She was especially influenced by the sense-training materials and interactive activities that Itard used. Cognizant of the fact that, if early intervention was successful with children who were clearly intellectually delayed, then so much the better for children who had normal intelligence, but perhaps were missing the basic experiences due to the disadvantage of the living conditions and low socio-economic status of their impoverished backgrounds, Montessori reckoned that methods she had previously used in educating mentally handicapped children should not be limited to their needs only. She reasoned that these methods

"***contained educational practices more rational than those in use and that similar methods applied to normal children would develop or set free their personality in a marvelous and surprising way***" (Montessori, 1912, p 12).

Montessori's supposition that, if she could be successful in educating "feebleminded" children, then there must be something missing in the educational program for normal children led her to concentrate on education for very young children (between the ages of three and six) in the slum areas of Rome. Froebel's contributions to Montessori's continued work in the field of early childhood education are apparent in her belief that self-directed, self-initiated activity was fundamental to intrinsic motivation and encouraging the child's quest for further learning. Froebel's Gifts further reinforced the ideas she had adopted from Itard, and, based on these, Montessori developed her own didactic

materials, including graduated cylinders, geometric shape boards and lacing and buttoning frames. These didactic materials have become predecessors of the games and equipment found in many early childhood classrooms today.

The Montessori method advocated leaving children alone at their work or play, tolerating any mess that might be disturbing to the teachers on the premise that, as it is the child who is engaging in the activity, it is the child who understands exactly what is happening. Whilst purporting to allow the children freedom to explore the materials she provided, Montessori's method was extremely, albeit subtly, directed by the teacher, somewhat reminiscent of the strong emphasis that the Puritans put on the value of the adult's point of view in the education and discipline of young children. In the same sense, the didactic materials were Montessori's idea of what the children wanted. Although Montessori maintained that the play activity must be self-selected and an end to itself in order to be effective, she did, in fact, dictate the choices by provision of the didactic materials that she herself designed. In reality, it seems to me that the children's interest might have been more meaningfully sustained by the opportunity to dress a doll in doll clothes rather than practising similar activities on a Spartan wooden fastening frame.

Her training as a medical doctor was the basis for many of the rules Montessori established for the Children's Houses. The children had to conform to her standards of cleanliness or risk being asked to leave the school. In the Montessori schools, the children were expected only to eat the proper food as stipulated by Montessori's dietary regime, drawn

from her background as a medical doctor. They were directed to speak only about "nice" things. In this regard, children were encouraged to converse only about things that happened outside the school setting. One might wonder if Montessori's encouragement of this sort of talk, under the guise of language development, could have been a subtle way to find out the "language of home" as it were, in order for her to advise the children that this was not proper language to use, thereby imposing her own values of what was right and what was wrong on the discussion topics.

Montessori appears to have been obsessed with discipline and, indeed, she devoted an entire chapter in her methods book to a discussion of the topic. The "semblance" of peace that was so important to her in the schools may well have stemmed from her belief that the disorder in the impoverished homes of the children encouraged the unruliness that she was determined to change.

Around the same time as Montessori was working with children in Italy, John Dewey was acknowledging changes in children that were, he contended, brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Children were no longer involved in the process of 'making' goods. They were presented with manufactured items of which they had little or no idea of the process that had occurred in the manufacturing of such items. Hence, he argued, schools must change to meet the changing needs of the children. No longer were teachers most effective when they stood before the children and lectured, encouraging rote learning of facts.

Children must 'learn by doing' and teachers should be guides, questioning actions and encouraging problem-solving.

Dewey believed, as did Rousseau, that education should be compatible with the natural and individual growth of children. Children would learn and develop through their experiences of interacting with the environment and not necessarily by following the educational interests of an adult. A child, he argued, was ***'able to make choices, evaluate consequences and otherwise participate in his [her] own education.'*** (Butt, 1978, p 79).

Dewey proposed three stages of psychological development in children (Boyd and King, 1995). He envisaged the early childhood years, those years with which this thesis is concerned, as the play period. During this period, he maintained that children were developing socially and emotionally, striking out into society and leaving the confines of home. Children would learn through play and concrete experiences. His focus on active learning, continuity of experiences and recognition of the importance of the influences of family on learning continue to be important elements in the development of high quality early childhood programmes 100 years later.

Clearly, the work of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Dewey had a powerful impact on the nature of early years education in the first half of the twentieth century. They laid the foundation and provided the impetus for twentieth century educators to continue focussing research

on theory of child development. A great deal of the current philosophy stems from the valuable contributions they made in terms of emphasising the importance of the early years as they attempted to ensure that children received the essential educational experiences that would provide a firm foundation for future learning. Not only have their philosophies impacted upon the attention currently centred on principles of child development, but the materials and activities derived from the programmes of these educators are still, in one form or another, an integral part of many early childhood programmes of the 1990s.

In the early twentieth century, whilst Switzerland, Germany and Italy were changing the appearance of early education due to the efforts of Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori, Susan Isaacs was deeply influencing the continuing development of early years education in Britain. The British Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School (Board of Education, 1931) refers the reader to Isaac's *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* and '***the suggestive observations and inferences made by a most cautious and well-informed observer***', and to the richness '***in instructive ideas for the education of young children at these earlier stages***'. A trained psychologist with a keen interest in the importance of providing developmentally appropriate early years education, Isaacs took the position of Director of a new, experimental school, the Malting House School, in Cambridge, in 1924. Given the freedom to set up the programme for three to seven year olds, she offered opportunities for the children to notice things of interest, to explore these and then to discuss ideas and carry out extension activities based on their interests.

Isaacs saw herself as strongly influenced by Froebel's writings. She supported his belief that children were not inherently "bad", only to be changed by the school, but that they had valuable qualities and just needed time to unfold. Whilst she did not equate human development with the distinct stages of the metamorphosis of an insect, she did talk of stages which were not distinct, but unfolded gradually:'***"If we keep in mind the fact that in human children the passage from one phase to another is always gradual, we can go then on to usefully consider what the different phases are.***' (Isaacs, 1946, p 21) She was keenly aware, as was he, of the benefits of children learning through play. She understood child-centred education and the value of the "***nature and function of play and helped others to understand it***"(Gardner, 1969, p 74). Montessori also influenced Isaacs philosophy of early years education:

"***And Dr. Montessori has persuaded us to see how great a pleasure and how rich an education the young child can get from the 'exercises of practical life'*** "(Isaacs, 1948, p 18).

Drawing on some of the ideas of her predecessors, Isaacs created a child-centred environment with materials based on those of Montessori and with manipulatives, specifically counters such as beads and shells, that were "real" to the children. As Montessori did, Isaacs ensured that the furniture was child-sized and that a cooking area was provided. The children were offered opportunities to explore nature as they were given responsibility for the care of small animals and were provided with gardening plots and the necessary gardening tools, reminiscent of those opportunities that Froebel's students received. Isaacs did

challenge Montessori's notion of the importance of concentrating on the training of the five senses and, instead, advocated that children were more interested in interacting with their environment and discovering **why** things happened the way they did rather than engaging in activities that aimed particularly to sharpen the senses.

The atmosphere of the Malting House School was somewhat permissive since, in addition to allowing the children freedom with their emotions, Isaacs did not offer a fixed curriculum, but encouraged the children to engage in the activity that most appealed to them at a particular moment- a forerunner, along with Froebel's ideas, to the Progressive Education Movement. The educators at the school were seen as guides and facilitators, indirectly suggesting activities, under the premise that the students would select those most suited to his or her own needs. "Finding things out" was the basis for the educational program. No attempt was made to formally teach reading or to develop fine motor coordination. With an emphasis on the development of gross motor skills, the students were allowed to actively explore their environment.

Isaacs felt that there were three advantages to offering freedom of action and activity to young children (Gardner, 1969):

1. The teachers would have more intimate knowledge of their pupils if the emotions were allowed to be freely expressed. Certainly, I believe, this would allow teachers to more fully understand their pupils, but surely there needs to be a recognition that some control over emotional expression, particularly negative emotions, is a quality to be encouraged.

2. Suppressing strong emotions which could later result in aggression would be avoided. This, too, may be true, but, it seems to me, that assisting a child to find alternate ways of coping with aggressive feelings would, again, lead to more self-control and socially acceptable behavior.

3. The children would not be continually held down by the adult's control, but would gain control of their own emotions as they adjusted to the moods of the group. True, but, in my opinion, children often need the guidance and modeling of significant adults as they explore socially acceptable ways of expressing emotions.

As Isaacs was continually observing children- in and out of school- she did see the problems that could arise by allowing complete freedom to the children and would revise her ideas about child development based on her observations. For example, she changed her attitude about allowing her students complete freedom of verbal aggression as she realised the negative effects this was having not only on the self-esteem of the victims but on the development of the guilty feelings often felt by the perpetrator. Using her anecdotal observations of children's discussions and interactions, Isaacs first published *The Intellectual Growth of Young Children,* in 1931. She wrote, in contradiction to Piaget's writings, that children **could** think as adults and lacked, not the ability to do so, but the experience of life and opportunity. Isaacs argued that Piaget's early writings stressing the distinct changes that a child would pass through did not take into account all the variables in a child's life. Her own observations, she maintained, proved that in many circumstances children displayed not only an awareness of self- a necessary foundation, according to Piaget, for a sense of logic- but were ego-centric at the same time. One could

see ***"how false is any view of mental development which sees it as an affair of fixed stages***." (Isaacs, 1931, p 167).

Isaacs criticized the test conditions under which Piaget's research was conducted. She felt that the artificiality of the contrived conversations and one-to-one child/adult interactions did not offer any opportunities for spontaneity or provoking questions on the part of the child. Only by continually observing the child working his or her own world in meaningful situations of exploration and communication could one begin to predict how children develop. Although modified in later years, Piaget's "method clinique" is described by Phillips (1969, p. 4):

> ***"He observes the child's surroundings and his behavior, formulates a hypothesis concerning the structure that underlies and includes them both and then tests that hypothesis by altering the surroundings slightly- by rearranging the materials, by posing the problem in a different way, or even by overtly suggesting to the subject a response different from the one predicted by the theory.***"

Whilst Piaget's investigations often resulted from his observations of children's behaviors, the continuation of his research under experimental conditions meant manipulating variables to fit the subject's responses. Criticism of Piaget's method continues today, but Phillips reminds critics of "***the deliberate effort that is made to give the child opportunities for responses that would not fit the theory*** " (op cit. p. 5).

Piaget also disregarded the implications of experience and environment on his stage developments, Isaacs contended. The wide variety in children's background, she said, strongly influenced their development. Those children who came from homes with books, conversation,

community outings, holidays and parents who took an intelligent interest in their children's friendships and school progress would be much more able to see links between knowledge and generalise their knowledge to other situations. In contrast, the child from an illiterate, disinterested home would be unable to make meaningful connections and transfer their knowledge to new situations, particularly the problem-solving situations of Piaget's research. Isaacs said, "***The extent of influence of the environment relies on the length of sustainment and the response by the influential adult.***"(Isaacs, 1948 p 82). In other words, allowing children extended opportunities to problem-solve in meaningful situations with meaningful response and dialogue by adults and peers can enhance the development and understanding of important concepts. Piaget suggested the "collective monologuism" of the ego-centric stage was apparent as the child, whether playing alone or with peers, tended to carry on a dialogue with himself and did not direct questions or general conversational observations to his peers. In contrast, whilst observing the children in her school, Isaacs found that children's language could be sustained and directed to each other, and that they continually looked for replies from their peers.

Isaacs was keenly aware of the benefits of children learning through play, fantasy and imagination. Her influence on British nursery and infant teachers was strong as she reinforced their belief in the importance of play. Gardner (p. 73) says

"She led them to realise the seriousness of the child's interest in solving problems and the reality of his thinking when engaged in

spontaneous play, and also to appreciate the intensity of the young child's feelings and the reality of their emotional needs."

Her books encouraged teachers to observe and record students in an attempt to understand their needs. As they reflected on their observations, teachers could begin to construct their own educational theories and thoughts.

Growth in the provision of early years' programming and intervention was not confined to the European scene. The beginning of the twentieth century saw a changing commitment to meeting the needs of disadvantaged children in their own homes instead of institutions. As early as 1913, in an attempt to provide educational assistance for children in need, New York City hired a former school teacher as its first visiting home teacher (Wasik et al., 1990). The education authorities wanted to address the problems of truancy, behavior, poor academic standings, poor home conditions and neglect. The teacher used a holistic approach in her attempt to intervene in the educational lives of the targeted children. First, she became familiar with the neighbourhood, not only with the attitudes of the people towards education and the settings in which they lived and worked, but with the available educational and recreational programs and social services. From this came an understanding of and basis for providing for the needs of each child. In the USA, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1990) continues to support an holistic approach as indicated in this guideline for curriculum development:

"***Curriculum respects and supports individual, cultural and linguistic diversity. Curriculum supports and encourages a positive relationship with children's families*** (p 30)".

As Jean Piaget's work came to the forefront of educational research in the 1930's, some of his ideas showed the influence of Montessori's observational research into how children develop. He fully supported Montessori's recognition of the value of giving children freedom to choose and to participate actively in their own learning. He did note, however, that Montessori "...did not go far enough with her own ideas; she was not faithful to her initial intuition". (DeVries and Kholberg, 1990 p 284). That Montessori's method was based on activity using concrete materials and advocated independence of action and choice, Piaget did not dispute. He agreed, too, that cognition development occurred in stages and that the stages came in a particular order, each dependent upon the full development of the one before. Piaget, though, in contrast to Montessori's view that spontaneous discovery was important only within the "constraints of the development of correct ideas" (DeVries and Kholberg, p 265) believed that the errors made during discovery had a constructive value, enabling the child to learn through problem-solving.

Piaget was not an educator and was initially unconcerned with the problems of education. His work was mainly philosophical, designed to provide a theory of knowledge based on his research evidence, but, as Elkind (1970, p. 81) says:***"... his work had its greatest impact upon education and educators***". Out of Piaget's work came some general principles which have affected the development of modern educational

programming (Elkind, op cit.):

1. Children have a different way of communicating. Although children have many ideas, they express them differently from adults. Teachers need to understand the difference in children's linguistic communication and respond in a manner that is meaningful to the child.

2. Children, whilst they constantly acquire new knowledge, are also constantly unlearning and relearning what they already know in relation to time, space, causality, number and quantity. Teachers need to broaden the educational program in order to help children adapt their existing knowledge to new information.

3. Children have acquired notions about the world through their spontaneous interactions with the environment. Teachers need to ensure that the curriculum is child-centred and encourages the natural curiosity of their students.

Elkind suggests that Piaget's effect on education has been to emphasise a broadening of the curriculum, to help educators recognise that what children learn about themselves in the process of education may be more important than the curriculum content itself and to encourage learning as a lifelong pursuit. He states that:

"***Once we acknowledge that children are learning something all of the time- even if it is not what we set out to teach them- then we have considerably broadened our options for teaching children and for directing their mental growth.***" (p 99)

Whilst Piaget and Montessori did not completely concur in all of the principles they developed, they did converge in many aspects. Both used observation of children to define previously unknown and unexpected facets of children's thought and behavior. From this, both derived general principles regarding thought formation and behavior in children. Out of these observations Piaget postulated a new philosophy of knowledge and Montessori, a new philosophy of education.

Their scientific backgrounds- Piaget trained as a biologist and Montessori as a medical doctor- enabled them to see "mental growth as an extension of biological growth, and as governed by the same principles and laws" (Elkind, 1970, p. 105). Although both Piaget and Montessori emphasised the "normal" stages of development as opposed to individual differences, Piaget identified mental conceptual stages through which all children passed in the course of development and Montessori emphasised the "sensitive periods" for learning and "explosions" into exploration that were common to all children.

The issue of 'quality' in early childhood education is a relatively recent term. Although it was not recognised, as such, by the educators and philosophers discussed above, their work and writings certainly identify specific elements of early learning that have become components of the argument for providing 'quality' early childhood education. They addressed the importance of a child-centred approach, that is, one that incorporates play into learning and that includes the holistic development of the child. They stressed the importance of parent and community involvement in the early years, the importance of a positive self-esteem, and the importance of early intervention for children who may have been considered 'at risk' for any number of reasons. Above all, these educators and philosophers stressed the critical importance of providing well-matched, appropriate experiences (i.e. good learning situations) in the early years as a foundation for later learning.

This long tradition of emphasis on the early years in education resulted, in the 1960s, in a wealth of research on children's learning, which often drew upon Piaget's theories of the stages of development. Hunt's (1961) research on early experience and intelligence encouraged educators to provide opportunities to "maximize the potential" of their students by recognizing that positive motivation and pleasure are inherent in the learning process when there is a match between new situations encountered and the child's previously assimilated experiences.

Hunt based much of his research on Piaget's theory that ***'life is a continuous creative interaction between the organism and the environment*** ' (Hunt, 1961, p 111) and stressed that the early years are the optimum time for children to find the meaning behind abstract concepts such as those presented in the mathematical operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Through manipulation of concrete objects in informal and game situations, with an emphasis on the use of language to discuss and describe what is happening, young children gain an understanding of the conceptual bases of these operations. It is not through demonstration or observation of an adult manipulating objects, but through actual involvement with **real** objects that children internalize these basic concepts.

Hunt argues that '***the notion of a continuous organism/environment interaction need not imply that an increased rate of development will necessarily be sustained if the circumstances of the later period fail to supply a proper match for the schemata which the child has***

already assimilated during the earlier period.'(Hunt, op cit., p 278)- a caution that boredom in subsequent schooling could negate the positive effects of early learning. Whilst the early years in educational settings are important, Hunt suggests that a child who spends two years at play in a nursery program and then moves on to a third year of the same sort of play in a kindergarten setting will find little motivation or opportunity to maximize the potential for intellectual development. In his 1993 address to the annual Alberta Early Childhood Education Council Conference, Elliot Eisner reiterated Hunt's caution as he told delegates that early childhood education should "***sustain a child's sense of wonder and appetite for exploration and the pursuit of intrinsic motivation.***" Children must enjoy what they are doing in order to find meaning and the challenge to continue the learning process. As Baughman (cited by Lawrence, 1988, p. 73) said in 1919, ***"Learning begins in pleasure and thrives on curiosity."***

To those of us whose chief concern today is to ensure that all children have a reasonable chance for success in the classroom, the influences of 18th and 19th century educators such as Pestalozzi, Itard, Froebel and Montessori have provided the next step up in the stairway leading to the understanding of the process inherent in children's learning. In the 20th century, we tread upon the stairs of Isaacs, Piaget and Hunt. More recently, three disparate, but powerful, elements, in addition to successfully influencing each other, have done a great deal to focus on the value of learning in the early years. In 1967, the Plowden Report in England was instrumental in, highlighting, amongst other issues, the importance of child-centred learning. In America, David Weikart drew upon the official statements of the Report as he established the goals

and objectives for the Perry Pre-School Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan in the 1960s. In turn, the NAEYC has incorporated several of the successful strategies used by the Perry Pre-School Project into its Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum (1988).

In 1967, the Plowden Report, (CACE, 1967) supported by a separate volume of relevant research, identified issues relating to children and primary schooling. ***"Learning is a continuous process from birth"*** the Report said (p.196) and, as such, issues relating to effective education needed to be examined in the context of the 1960's. Four of the issues, those of the developmental nature of the child, the relationships between family, school and the community, nursery provision and child-centred education dealt very specifically with early learning. Whilst Skinner's behaviorist theory of learning, one which advocated conditioning, reinforcing and measuring behaviors, had gained some popularity in the United States at the time, it was the cognitive-interactionist views of Isaacs and Piaget that effectively influenced the Report (CACE, 1967). This view proposed that learning involved continuous interaction between the learner and the environment. The emphasis was on the individual as an active, continually adapting learner, searching for meaning through spontaneous play and interaction with the environment and significant people within it (King et. al., 1994).

As it addressed the issue of the nature of the child and the stages of development identified by Piaget, the Report recognised individual differences in rates of maturation. This variation in all aspects of growth and development indicated a need for schools to consider not

just chronological age, but more importantly, developmental age in planning for the students' needs. Taking into account the individual's "variability" in intellectual, emotional and physical growth presented a problem in terms of meeting the needs of **all** students. Schools needed to provide for a "***multitude of differently developing talents, with their own appropriate times and degrees of achievement***" (CACE, p 10). The NAEYC echoed this recommendation in the 1980s in its position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, stating that ***"...a principle of practice for primary-age children is that the curriculum provide many developmentally appropriate materials for children to explore and think about and opportunities for interaction and communication with other children and adults***" (NAEYC, 1988).

A second issue identified by the Plowden Report focussed on the "power of the environment" to influence children's learning. The importance of parent/school linkage was stressed since the attitudes of parents and teachers indirectly affected those of the children

"What matters most are the attitudes of teachers to parents and parents to teachers-whether there is genuine mutual respect, whether parents understand what the schools are doing for their individual children and teachers realise how dependent they are on parental support." (CACE, p.40)

In addition to suggestions for parent participation in the schools, the Report recommended that the Local Education Authorities (LEA) establish Educational Priority Areas, based on such factors as socio-economic status, handicapping conditions, English as a Second Language families, and single parent families. By providing more teachers and teacher aides and ensuring that colleges and universities linked teacher training to the needs of the children in the priority areas,

LEAs could intervene to assist the "most severely deprived children in the country".

The third issue relating to early learning addressed the provision of nursery education. Again, intervention played an important role in providing children from socially deprived neighbourhoods with nursery programs that offered much needed "***verbal stimulus, opportunities for constructive play, a more richly differentiated environment and the access to medical care that good nursery schools can provide***" (CACE, op cit. p 63). In the substantial section devoted to the provision of nursery education, amongst the issues with which the Report dealt, were those of who should have access to nursery education (all those who wished), why it was an important part of education (to form the basis for the rest of the school years), allocation and training of staff, and the importance of parent involvement not only in the nursery programs but in their children's daily lives. The final recommendation was for a large expansion of nursery provision as soon as possible, an expansion which Britain still awaits (1996).

Fourth, the Report discussed children and a developmentally appropriate curriculum. In stressing its importance in the early years curriculum, the learning elements of play were highlighted. Play is critical in helping children learn to organise their environment, providing opportunities for them to explore physical and social relationships and offering outlets for the expression of fantasy and imagination. A developmentally appropriate curriculum would also integrate subject areas, providing the students opportunities for "***seeing***

different dimensions for subject work and of using the forms of observation and communication which are most suitable to a given sequence of learning" (CACE, p. 199). In an integrated curriculum, children would not be assimilating inert ideas, but linking their thoughts, feelings and actions. Taking into account the individual differences amongst the students in a learning group, each could take what was most meaningful, dependent upon his or her own level. The NAEYC (1988) continues to highlight the importance of curriculum integration and suggests that this developmentally appropriate practice would allow learning to occur "***primarily through projects, learning centres and playful activities that reflect current interests of children***" (p. 70).

Whilst the Plowden Report did much in England to support and further beliefs about early learning (McKean, 1989; Liebschner, 1991; McPherson, 1993; Alexander, 1993), it also impacted upon early years programming in other countries. In addition to the educational recommendations, the Report encouraged the continuation of educational research, specifically targeting longitudinal studies that focussed on individual differences in growth and development and the effects of interpersonal relationships and the environment on these differences. The 27-year follow-up, by Schweinhart and Weikart (1994), to the Perry Pre-School Project is just such a study which points to the cost-effectiveness of a high quality early years program for the child and for society.

A second area of investigation, the Report recommended, should be collaborative projects between universities, colleges and practicing

teachers in order to assess the success and failures of early education programmes established in EPAs. As well, the Report urges researchers to look at the "***occurrence and nature of critical learning periods from nursery age onwards***". Since publication of the Plowden Report, researchers in countries throughout the world have continued their investigations into the critical nature of early childhood education and its impact on future success for the child and society.

A review of early childhood provision in a selection of Continental European countries and the United States follows in Chapter 2. In addition, Chapter 2 provides a brief description of early childhood education in two Canadian provinces, and England and Wales. Although the provision in these two countries will be examined in depth as the thesis develops, this overview provides evidence that many countries have accepted elements of early childhood provision that address their culturally embedded views of 'quality' and have incorporated them into policy and implemented them into programming.

Chapter 2: Early Years Education in Other Countries

The main thrust of the fieldwork will focus, for comparative purposes and ease of access, on two Canadian provinces, Alberta and New Brunswick, and Nottinghamshire, in England, and Mid Glamorgan, in Wales. Whilst these four areas are not meant to be indicative of all of Canada and Britain, they do provide a 'snapshot' of early childhood provision in the two countries.

As I have stated, the focus of this thesis is centred on the four areas indicated above; yet a brief glimpse of early years provision in several European countries offers insight in to the priorities of their particular governments in terms of the benefits of providing access to education for children under compulsory school age. It would be inconceivable to attempt to describe early childhood provision in all the European countries. With this in mind, and in addition to the individual reasons explained in Chapter One, I have chosen the seven countries for the following collective reasons:

1. The high percentage of children attending preschool in these countries is indicative of the need and perceived importance by parents and policy makers for such provision.

2. They have developed policy directly related to providing early childhood provision prior to compulsory schooling.

3. The early childhood programmes in these countries embrace many of the elements that have been identified as important in ensuring accessible and appropriate provision for young children.

In addition, the impact of compensatory programmes originating in the United States in the 1960s and of the position papers of the NAEYC cannot be disputed. These have had a major influence throughout the world and many countries, including Britain and Canada have modeled some of their own programmes after them.

These European countries have traditionally provided various forms of early childhood care and education, and one cannot deny the influence that these countries have had on both ideology and provision in England and Wales, as well as in North America. In addition to the 'European influence', and largely due to its close proximity, Canada has been influenced by early childhood programmes developed in the United States. Since it will be necessary, from time to time, to refer to information concerning international provision, this chapter will provide an overview of early childhood education in several European countries and the United States, as well as outlining early years provision in the Canadian provinces and in England and Wales.

Belgium

Nursery provision began in Belgium near the end of the nineteenth century. Since then the *ecoles maternelles*, as they are known, have become a way of life for children between the ages of two and a half and five and are acknowledged as a basic entitlement for **all** Belgian children- the first phase in the educational journey. Belgian nursery education is provided at no cost for those parents who wish to access it and is fundamentally child-centred. Formal drills and lessons are pushed aside in favour of meaningful, often individualised activities. The recognition that ***"children's development and learning are not***

the result of an accumulation of facts and knowledge, but a slow construction which the children themselves craft" (Andries and David, 1993) has resulted in the following goals of Belgian nursery education:

1. to provide an holistic education

2. to encourage self-esteem by providing a safe, secure environment

3. to develop communication skills and self-expression, divergent thought and logic

4. to provide continuity at transition points in education

5. to encourage autonomy, responsibility and co-operation

6. to foster respect for individual needs

7. to reduce school failure

(adapted from Andries and David, op. cit.)

Fostering the growth and development of all Belgian children is of prime importance in nursery education and intervention for disadvantaged children is considered vital. The Belgian Ministry of Education, in an attempt to combat school failure, is encouraging schools to develop and implement projects that are designed to promote flexible and harmonious programmes for the pupils and to assist them in becoming autonomous learners from an early age. The French study by Jarousse et al. (1993) has pointed out the long-term benefits that occurred in children when they began nursery education before the age of three. Taking this evidence into consideration, the Belgian government funds nursery education for all Belgian children

from the age of two and one half and continuing until the compulsory school attendance age of six. 1993 estimates suggest that over 95 per cent of the children in this age range attend classes in the *ecoles maternelles*. (Andries and David, op cit.).

The ministry's aim is to develop, by the Year 2005, a system which would create more flexibility to meet pupils' needs and interests and encourage them to become more autonomous in their learning. The intention is to improve the current educational system by focussing on the priority of the French language as the official language of instruction, improving the transition between the various stages of education, and concentrating the assessment of pupils on process instead of product. In addition, the Ministry will ensure professional development opportunities are available in order for teachers to enhance their assessment strategies. In an effort to achieve these goals, the Ministry has highlighted the need to blend teaching strategies, finances and human resources and currently offers support to schools who develop innovative projects aimed at improving school success.

A recent (May, 1995) visit to a school in Brussels will illustrate the commitment by both government and schools to combating school failure. *L'Ecole Reine Astrid,* a school that provides for children in *ecole maternelle* through to primary age, highlighted one particular approach to combating school failure. The school focusses on ensuring a smooth transition from the *ecole maternelle* to the primary school. To this end, the staff attempts to create a family atmosphere where the children are treated with respect and positive encouragement. The transition to the primary school is eased in several ways. Since the

school's philosophy is that literacy acquisition takes place in a climate of acceptance, structured reading lessons are not imposed on the children in the *ecole maternelle*, but the teachers ensure that the children are surrounded by the written word in all aspects of the classroom activities. Tri-monthly projects, whereby the children from the primary school and the *ecole maternelle* are able to work together for a day, allow the older children to act as tutors to the younger ones, assisting them to read and to complete projects often suggested by the children themselves. The children also keep log books of their daily activities and these are continued when the children enter primary school.

One's perception of the school is that there is a focus on the development of the whole child and an investment by the teachers well beyond the call of duty, since not only do they continually plan together for the tri-monthly project days and strive to provide a positive educational environment for the children, but they are often members, with parents, of evening and weekend working parties to upgrade the physical condition of the school. The school appears to have made an adequate financial commitment to ensure that sufficient material resources are at hand, but the physical condition of the school is noticeably deteriorating. Whilst the children observed seemed to be happy, motivated and surrounded by caring staff, parents did not appear to be part of a full educational partnership with the school and were involved only in attending assemblies, assisting on field trips and working on school maintenance projects. This minimal involvement might well be extended if parents were given a larger part to play in actual classroom participation and in developing school policies.

This school, since its population includes children in their first and early years of schooling, has addressed the issue of the importance of appropriate early, educational provision. Whilst recognising that this particular model could not be transferred *in toto* to other schools, the school, with its innovative projects, has pulled a brick out of 'Jennings' (see p 148 of this thesis) wall" and provided an opportunity for other schools to find a way through the wall and blaze their own paths on the other side.

Whilst these ideas are not necessarily new to educational programmes in countries such as England, Canada and the United States, this particular Belgian authority seems to be making a concerted effort to combat school failure by recognising the importance of what is considered to be appropriate educational provision in the early years.

Denmark

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation reported, in 1993, that whilst the compulsory age for schooling in Denmark is seven years of age, eighty-five percent of children between the ages of three and seven are offered publicly funded provision. In 1993, 95 per cent of all five and six year olds attended kindergarten (Vilien, 1993). Although the country has a long tradition of daycare provision, two fairly recent developments have surfaced that point to the need for developmentally appropriate provision. First, over the last twenty years, Danish economics have dictated a need for both parents in a family to work. Second, younger women are becoming more motivated to seek personal satisfaction in a career. As children spend fewer hours within

the family setting, adults other than parents influence the education and rearing of children. Since most modern parents want to be assured of high quality provision for their children, two inter-related issues (adapted from Vilien, op cit.) confront Denmark:

1. **Currently, there are no demands by either government or local authorities concerning curriculum in daycare**. Although daycare curriculum is strongly based in Froebel's philosophy, it has adopted a Danish interpretation. Danish early childhood educator, Hedevig Bagger wrote in 1891:

"***Froebel is too much "institution"- we want a more homelike environment, more free play and child initiative*** ."
(from Vilien, 1993, p 24).

Most programmes offer a substantial amount of time for free choice and play because of the continuing belief in Bagger's philosophy that children learn best through play and benefit from opportunities for self-selection of activities. Warren (1993) suggests that early childhood professionals in Denmark view themselves, not as teachers, but as providers of a safe, play environment, one that respects the uniqueness of each child and encourages holistic development through play. Prior to 1993, teachers had the freedom and flexibility to develop their own programmes and were not hindered by having to adhere to local or government guidelines. A major legislative change, in 1993, addressed this issue and resulted in a new direction for teachers and parents -a partnership in children's learning. Every child care centre was mandated to establish parent/teacher boards to jointly develop programme goals, so whilst government and local authorities are not providing programme guidelines, more stakeholders (that is, parents) are involved in goal-setting.

The quality of daycare is of minor importance in legislation. Warren's (op cit.) observations of Danish nurseries have led her to propose that, instead of giving all children, regardless of age, the same activities, staff need to take advantage of their observations of children and provide them with opportunities that are carefully designed to support and extend their knowledge. Whilst the government has encouraged continuity in programming for young children in terms of meaningful, relevant and integrated curricula, decisions regarding funding, integration of special needs students, pupil/teacher ratios, ESL students and provision for cultural minorities remain at the community level. The government did enact a teacher training law that has required, since September, 1992, three and one half years training and education at special colleges for pre-school teachers.

2. **The demand for daycare provision, contrary to expectations by society and politicians, continues to remain steady, rather than decline.**

In spite of the declining birth rate, several factors have been cited for this continuing demand for daycare (Vilien, op cit.). Not only do more mothers enter the workforce, both for economic and personal reasons, but those who choose to stay at home feel isolated and want their children to be more involved with their peer groups.

Recognising the importance of early screening and early intervention, Denmark offers this service to all parents when their children are three years of age. Almost 99 per cent of the parents take advantage of the screening and the support, if needed, in the form of special help at home or in kindergarten, and as a result, reading levels have increased

substantially (Pagaard, 1995). On-going discussions between stakeholders (that is, government, local authorities, community agencies, parents and teachers) must continue to ensure the availability of funding for further research, programme evaluation and continuing professional development in order to maintain the quality provision in Denmark for children under compulsory school age.

France

France has been at the forefront of European pre-school education since 1882 when the government decreed that young children were to "receive the care demanded by their physical, intellectual and moral development and that they may be admitted to care at the age of two and remain until they are seven years old" (Goutard, 1993). Thus began the *Ecole Maternelle Francaise* (EMF), continuing today with 95 per cent of three, four and five year-old children (the compulsory school age is six) attending EMF (National Commission on Education, 1993).

Three overarching goals are prominent in the EMF:

1. to prevent or reduce impaired development by detecting handicapping conditions as early as possible. Children with special needs are integrated wherever possible, with classroom assistance based on individual needs.

2. to compensate for cultural disadvantages. Jarousse, Mingat and Richard (1991) examined the effects of EMF and found that school failure decreased in direct relation to the length of time the child spent in the EMF.

3. to equalise educational opportunities so that **all** children can develop their capabilities. Flexibility of programming in EMF allows rural children to participate by using primary classrooms that are available in their communities

and linking community groupings through provision of transportation, mobile classrooms and itinerant teachers. (adapted from Goutard, op cit.)

The national curriculum for the EMF is confined to four broad areas: physical activities, communication skills, artistic and aesthetic activities and scientific and technological activities. Whilst engaging in cooperative activities with others, children are provided opportunities to explore, compare, discover and observe.

The effects of attendance in EMF have been far-reaching. Research (Jarousse et al, op cit.) has shown a decrease in school failure that correlates to the length of time spent in the EMF. The effects were particularly significant for children who began EMF at three years of age or younger. Although the effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds were more marked, they did continue into secondary school. Attendance at EMF is seen as a right for all families, regardless of their cultural or geographical heritage or socio-economic status. Thus, ***"...attendance at the ecole maternelle appears to be an important factor in reducing inequalities***" (Goutard, op cit., p. 40).

The main purpose of EMF could be considered a compensatory one as the programme strives to detect handicapping conditions as early as possible, to compensate for cultural disadvantages and to equalise opportunities for **all** children in France. In addition to the provision of care during the regular working day, out-of-school care is available in the early mornings and evenings for most children who require it. Publicly funded child care facilities have increased, employers are

increasingly becoming participants in child care provision and parents are given tax-relief on child care costs for children under the age of six.

The success of the integration of the *ecoles maternelles* into the French education system is evident, but Goutard (op.cit) cautions against the downward extension of the primary curriculum into the *ecoles maternelles.* She says (pp 54-55) ***"In the place of facilitating the flowering of whole children at the same time as fostering academic success, one is being expected to focus, above all else, on measurable academic success."*** Such a view runs the risk of losing the focus of early learning, that is, the natural, spontaneous and curious interests of the children to explore and discover meaning, in favour of rigidly formalised schooling that will provide statistically measurable outcomes.

Although the compulsory school age has been reduced to six, and state-funded provision in the *Ecoles Maternelles* continues today for pre-school children in France, various projects have been launched that aim to provide early intervention for children from 'at risk' families. One such project, begun in 1986 and continuing today (Coombes, 1995) is the ACEPP (*Association des Collectifs Enfants-Parents-Professionnels).* This association is a parent/professional partnership of over 1 000 day-care facilities in France. The philosophy behind the association is to provide disadvantaged families with equal opportunities to access child care facilities for their children. With the involvement of parents, the transition between home and school is eased, parents realise more fully their own responsibilities in the care and education of their children and each group becomes a 'mutual

support system' for the parents. The ACEPP integrates services for young children in an attempt "... to combat the various risk factors" (Coombes, op cit. p69) which may be found in children from low socio-economic or culturally mixed areas.

A second initiative begun in 1981 by the French government is the ZEP (*Zones of Educational Priority)* programme. Restructured in 1990, the ZEP attempt, similarly to the AECPP, to integrate educational, health, cultural and community services in areas where children are considered 'at risk', due to 'urban decay, rural isolation, large numbers of families in need. or where there is a high percentage of non-French speaking immigrants.' (Franco-British Council, 1996, p 13). The focus of this programme is to provide integrated services aimed at early intervention with reduced or eliminated costs to the families, to ensure smooth transitions and continuity between home and school and to offer parent education programmes.

Germany

The unification of Germany has resulted in contradictions in early childhood care and education. The diversity of pre-unification needs in the East and West has contributed to a growing concern about the differences in provision in a unified Germany- differences that actually represent a switch in traditional care availability. Before the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the East had an abundance of care facilities that are now undersubscribed. The West was focussed on the family as the primary caregivers and is now faced with a demand for early childhood care that cannot currently be met.

In the years following the Second World War, West Germany provided early education only for children with special needs. The political refusal to undermine the importance of the family as primary care-givers began to shift, in the 70s, to a recognition that, not only is kindergarten the first step in education but, that it should be universally available. Today, more women are joining the workforce, resulting in changing lifestyles and parental expectations. The time children spend within the family unit has diminished and a need has arisen to organise children's lives in outside care and education. The controversy is now focussed on the lack of spaces available for all those who want access to care and early education and whether out-of-home care for children under three years of age "damages the child and undermines the family"(Colberg-Schrader and Oberhuemer, 1993, p. 58).

In post-war East Germany, the economic necessity for women to enter employment meant the acceleration of subsidised care. By 1973, pre-school education was a part of the state educational system, offering equal access for all children. In 1989, 95 per cent of all children between three and the compulsory school age of six, attended a kindergarten programme. Since unification, the economic upheaval has resulted in women losing their jobs, a lowered birthrate and family relocation in the west. The demand for public care, quite the opposite to that in the west, has decreased and is no longer funded by the government.

The unique problems of east and west are added to those common to the new Federal Republic of Germany. Families have become smaller-one third of all children have no siblings (Colberg-Schrader and

Oberhuemer, op cit.); streets have become unsafe for play; and the tradition of extended families living together is dying out. All these have contributed to the decrease in opportunities for peer and adult interaction in the home and neighbourhood environment. The changing face of Europe has resulted in an influx of migration to Germany, introducing ethnic minorities that require a multicultural educational approach, emphasising awareness and acceptance. Today, kindergarten and child care fall under the Ministry of Social Affairs and, in spite of a basic framework addressing funding, facilities, staffing and parent participation, legislation aimed at programming is sparse. On a more positive note, employers are actively seeking ways of assisting with child care provision and tax relief is available to parents who engage domestic help to care for their children whilst they are at work.

Italy

In Italy, state-run nursery schools were established, by law, in 1968. These are open to all children three to six years of age and must adhere to compulsory guidelines established by the state. The state schools strive to combine individuality and diversity, yet maintain the "***traditional function of completing and complementing the child's education and care by the family***" (Pusci, 1991, p. 83). Gone is the traditional image of a daycare centre. Instead, pre-schools have been reorganised as part of the school system and essentially integrate family care and child care.

State-run pre-schools have resulted in a rise in quality and availability. No longer do lack of provision or economics dictate who attends. In

1991-92, over 92 percent of Italian children three to six years of age attended pre-school- 50 per cent in state-run schools. Whilst diversity in provision exists, the establishment of state-run nurseries ensures equal opportunities for all families, especially for mothers choosing between a career and the traditional homemaker role. The state-run schools have also seen a rise in developmentally appropriate programming, particularly in strategies, activities and resources. The schools offer fully integrated access, regardless of race, culture, language, religion, gender, class or special needs.

Italian law requires parent involvement, usually accomplished with assemblies, meetings and involvement on parent councils. Through council channels, parents may submit general educational proposals suggesting, for example, innovations that would improve the quality of provision. Pusci (op cit.) cautions that, although stronger home-school links may be established with parent councils, there exists the possibility of inhibiting innovative, educational endeavours if parents insist on adhering to traditional programme models.

Assessment in the pre-schools is essentially formative. Instead of ranking children against others or classifying them as achieving specific stage goals, assessment focusses on what each child can do in relation to his or her own development. Through identification of difficulties and achievements, a more individualised approach is taken.

The goals of Italian pre-school remain focussed on the child, offering opportunities to develop motor skills through play, to make meaning of language and literacy, to develop logical concepts of space, order and

measure and scientific concepts of objects, time and nature, to communicate through messages, shape and space and to develop relationships emphasising self-esteem and interaction with others.

Spain

Spain went through a great deal of change in early education for the twenty years following the 1970 establishment of pre-school levels in the educational system. Finally, in 1990, law was passed that described the components of education and recognised the autonomy of the various political communities that make up Spain. The Central Government now establishes minimum guidelines and curricular aspects, whilst the Communities develop curricula for different stages of education. The first stage- infant education - is aimed at children from birth to six years of age and is not compulsory. This, in turn, is divided into two cycles- one for children under three and the second cycle for children between three and six years of age.

The principles of early education established by the Ministry of Education appear to be closely aligned to those of the NAEYC (1991) and clearly indicate the emphasis on developmentally appropriate programmes. It is possible that they might provide a typical modern model for early childhood education programmes:

1. Schools must develop partnerships with parents. Parents participate not only in the operation and management of schools, but are closely involved in classroom and school activities.

2. Pupils must be offered opportunities to make meaningful connections between prior and new experiences and knowledge. The process of building meaning should focus on individuality, discovery, observance and exploration.

3. Teaching and learning must be holistic. Learning is not just an accumulation of new ideas, but a process of establishing relationships between past and present, old and new.

4. Processes such as play, experimentation, manipulation and problem-solving are to be encouraged.

5. Children must feel safe enough to contribute to the establishment of rules and goals for learning in order to build autonomy and self-confidence.

6. The organisation of space, materials and time must be flexible to take into account the diversity in children's rates of learning.

7. Facilities must be fit for child-centred learning and situated safely within a neighbourhood environment.

8. The entire team (school staff, parents and professional consultants) must work together to meet the particular special needs of any child.

9. The teacher, as a facilitator of learning, encourages and motivates children and provides for holistic development.

10. Assessment is holistic, constant, formative and contextualised. It is not a judgement against a child. With the initial school/parent diagnosis of the child's learning needs, continued observation and discussion will serve as a basis to keep parents regularly informed of their children's progress. (adapted from Odina, 1993)

The awareness over the last decade of the developmental uniqueness and individuality of the years between birth and six years of age led to the Preschool Education Reform Project in Spain. The purpose of the Project was "***to compensate as much as possible for the inequalities which arise from children's environments in order to ensure the equal opportunities that every democratic society requires***" (Odina, 1993, p. 95). The Project supports the philosophy of child-centred learning: that is, that children learn best through active involvement

with their environment, that learning must be connected to the children's previous experience and culture in order to make it meaningful, that learning must be facilitated by taking into account the interests, learning styles and diversity of the children and by providing opportunities for problem-solving and cooperation amongst the pupils.

Outcomes of the Project were positive. Not only did the pupils involved in the project show a higher rate of attendance at three years of age, but they also achieved better results in complexity and diversity of thought, mathematical, musical and creative skills and a more positive attitude, more independence, initiative and autonomy in their learning and a higher degree of concentration. Teachers displayed a higher degree of professional satisfaction and were more willing to be involved in professional development activities related to the project. In addition project teachers used more diversity in their teaching approaches. Parents of the pupils involved in the project became more positive towards school activities. They read to their children and themselves more often and appeared closer to understanding the goals of education.

Since the main purpose of early education in Spain is to compensate for any insufficiencies, disorders or inequalities due to learning disorders, underprivileged or minority backgrounds, gender, inequality, or location, all children with special needs are integrated with guidance from teams of school staff, psychologists and paediatricians and the support of additional teaching staff wherever required. Individual curricula are developed and the pupil/teacher ratio is reduced by five children if a special needs child is placed in a 'regular' classroom.

Compensatory education attempts to reach all children in isolated settlements throughout Spain. Itinerant teams of pre-school professionals develop programmes applicable to specific areas, taking into account family and environmental characteristics.

Spain is actively attempting to reduce inequality and strives to have children

"form a positive self-image of themselves, value their sexual and cultural identity, encourage independent behavior, establish positive links with both adults and their peers and to allow them to express themselves through play and other forms of expression in diverse activities and without prejudice derived from cultural or sexual stereotypes" (Odina, op cit., p. 111).

Sweden

The Swedish government appears to be committed to providing high quality educational care from birth (Pascal and Bertram, 1993). Although the compulsory school age is seven, since 1992, parents have been given the option of sending their six year-old children to school. Interestingly enough, many parents have chosen to leave their children in pre-school provision. Provision is varied in Sweden, as in other countries, and parents are able to choose amongst family daycare, daycare centres, nursery school or kindergarten, depending upon the age of the child and the needs of the family.

Since there is a wide-spread belief in developmentally appropriate programming and universal availability for all children from the age of twelve months (Bergman, 1993), Sweden offers full-time daycare and part-time nursery school. Programming in the nurseries attempts to develop the whole child- to improve the quality of experiences with environmental and cultural interactions, to foster learning through

work and play and to support the children's growing sense of identity, comprehension of the world around them and ability to communicate with others (Bergman, op cit.).

The cost of quality provision in Sweden is high. Whilst Local Authorities subsidise half the cost of early years provision, each wage earner in the country is levied a special child care tax, with parents making up the balance of the cost based on a sliding scale related to income. The current government is questioning the level of national funding required to support early provision and arguing for more choice, diversity and financial contributions from parents (Pascal and Bertram, op cit.).

Educational issues focussed on early years provision in Sweden concern the limited amount of research in relation to the abundance of available child care, the lack of early childhood chairs in higher education and the need to encourage more students to seek higher degrees in early childhood education. An additional issue is the lack of coordination and continuity at the national level, resulting from two supervising ministries- the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education- that discourages programmes from considering care and education together. There is a positive move by the Minister of Health and Social Affairs to mandate Local Authorities to offer child care based on demand by their constituents, but, clearly, the task before Sweden is that ***of "ensuring children's full development during this important period of growth***" (Bergman, op cit., p 13).

United States

As in Canada, The United States does not have a National Curriculum. Each of the fifty states is responsible for setting its own educational curriculum, although bills addressing educational issues of a general nature may be introduced and adopted in the federal legislature. If such bills are enacted, each state has the flexibility to implement the laws in ways which would, effectively, meet its own particular needs. For example, in 1990, all fifty states embraced President Bush's educational goals for the Year 2000. Amongst these are the ideals that every student would start school 'ready to learn', the dropout rate would be reduced and students would demonstrate excellence in science and mathematics (Boyer, 1991).

Whilst 28 states have legislation providing for some form of pre-school education, predictions for 1995 estimated that two thirds of all pre-school children and three quarters of school-aged children would require care outside the family (Lubeck, 1989). With the amount of time this will lead children to spend outside the family, it is reasonable to expect that there be an educational component to the provision. It is societal changes in the United States that have resulted in a greater demand for care for pre-schoolers. The current economic need (and the unlikelihood of a reduction in this trend in the near future) for a dual family income has meant that more mothers are working outside the home and increasingly rely upon extra-familial care. In addition, the birthrate has increased, thus more children are eligible for care. An increase in single parent families, the majority headed by women who tend to be victims of wage disparity, job segregation, inadequate child support payments or insufficient social welfare payments, has resulted

in an increased number of children living in poverty and considered to be 'at risk' educationally and socially.

Pre-school care currently available in the United States (Lubeck, 1989) ranges from family daycare homes with minimal state standards to daycare centres that must adhere to licensed standards established by each state. Public schools are beginning to offer child care, in recognition of the advantages to children and parents. A reliable source of state funding would ensure that standards are established and monitored. Salaries would be higher and benefits guaranteed. A common argument in support of locating care in schools is that "young children are best educated within the educational system" (Lubeck, op cit., p 7). As attractive as school-based care may appear, others argue that centralised, bureaucratic management could result in higher costs and developmentally inappropriate programmes for young children. The fear also exists, amongst those who run daycare centres, of a loss of livelihood if the convenience of school-based care successfully appeals to parents.

Amongst the issues that the United States needs to sort out are those of quality provision, wage disparity, affordability and government financial support . Research (Boyer, 1992; King et al., 1994; Moss and Pence, 1994; Bertram and Pascal, 1995) clearly points out that it is **quality** programming consisting of various inter-related components that has the greatest long-term benefits for children and society. Wage scales must be more equitable in order to encourage staff stability and provide continuity of care and programming for young children. All

parents must be able to afford quality care, not just those from the affluent sector. Policy makers must pay attention to the importance of the early years in education and ensure that these programmes are not the first under the chopping block when financial cuts are made. Perhaps, the suggestion of linking programmes to schools will be more likely to ensure a continuation of funding, appropriately developed and monitored programming, proper training and education for teachers and affordable fees for parents.

One of the most apparent contributions of the U.S. to early years education has been in the field of compensatory education. The notion of compensatory education gained popularity in the early 1960s when the government initiated Project Head Start as "a major weapon of the War of Poverty" (Woodhead, 1985, p 133). Piloted first as a summer project for disadvantaged children to help them to develop a positive self-concept and language competence, to correct medical and nutritional problems and to convince parents of the value of education (Hellmuth, 1970), the inadequacy of the short-term nature of the project became apparent along with the acknowledgement that enrichment without continuity of experience was futile.

Head Start quickly gained the impetus and federal government funding to provide longer-term programmes in the recognition that effective compensatory education must begin at an early age and continue until the child can maintain progress without extra assistance (Riles, 1970). Head Start became a multi-disciplinary, family-centred intervention programme, encompassing medical and dental services and nutritional, psychological and educational programmes with and emphasis on

parental involvement. Many models of Head Start sprang up throughout the U. S. and critiques began to focus on the washout effects of academic gains after the children returned to regular schooling for a year. But recent research (Peters, Bollin & Murphy, 1991) indicates that an emphasis on a home component and parent education can provide positive results for Head Start in terms of increased parent/child language interaction, provision of a more stimulating home environment and longer-term gains by the children.

A second influential American initiative, the High/Scope Perry Pre-school Project, was begun in 1968 and funded by the Carnegie Corporation in conjunction with the Ypsilanti, Michigan Public School System. The Project, begun as an offshoot of Head Start, held that preventative programming must begin earlier than kindergarten "to follow through on the promising, but seemingly transitory effects of Head Start on intellectual performance" (Schweinhart and Hohmann, 1992). The premise was that, since "the essential framework for intellectual growth is completed by age three" (Lambie and Weikart, 1970), and that potential for success is much stronger when a home teaching component is added, the teacher's role would be to constantly encourage the mothers to regard themselves as teachers and to focus on language growth, motor skill development and cognition.

Not only has the Perry Pre-school Project gained recognition in the United States, Britain has sent teachers for training in the project's philosophies and strategies and has implemented several models in various parts of England. The continuing impact of Head Start and the

Perry Pre-school Project on early childhood education in Canada and England will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

The NAEYC has also affected the goals and objectives of many pre-school intervention programmes in North America. Its influence is illustrated by the close alignment of provincial and state early childhood programmes objectives to the NAEYC position statements on principles of child development and developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum content and assessment for young children. Many similarities are obvious if one reviews the goals, objectives and references of the Programs of Studies for Alberta and New Brunswick.

It is apparent from the above descriptions of early childhood policies that these countries are striving to ensure that their young children have equitable access to effective, developmentally appropriate programmes. The same issues (for example, parent partnerships, positive self-esteem, child-centred approaches, development of the whole child) addressed by early educators, and discussed in the previous chapter, continue to be emphasised as important components of early years provision in these countries.

Canada

Since passage of the British North America Act in 1867 education in Canada has been purely a provincial matter. Hence, Canada does not have a National Curriculum. Federal input, today, occurs only in matters of aboriginal education (where, in fact, reserve schools follow provincial curricula, but are administered by the Federal Department of

Indian Affairs or by the band itself) and French Immersion programmes (with provision of additional funding for these schools). Instead of a single national curriculum, Canada has a mosaic of ten provincial and two territorial curricula. Although ten provincial Ministries of Education develop (with input from teachers, administrators and university academics) and administer the educational programmes, considerable similarities do exist and will be apparent in an overview of the early years programmes for Alberta and New Brunswick. In fact, the four Western provinces and two of the territories are currently working co-operatively to develop a common curriculum in Language Learning, Science and Mathematics. The flexibility to meet the unique needs of each province is definitely a positive outcome of provincial curriculum responsibility, but perhaps the absence of clear federal influence on educational policy has resulted in a glaring deficiency of innovative programme development, research and evaluation in education (Fullan, 1991).

Time constraints and the geographical vastness of Canada precluded an in-depth examination of pre-school provision and care in all of the provinces, but an overview will provide a flavour of the situation. Although compulsory schooling throughout Canada generally begins at the age of six years, all provinces, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, provide full or half day kindergarten programmes for five-year olds that are fully or partially funded by the provincial governments. For the most part the programmes are voluntary and focus on providing equal opportunities for all children. "***Early childhood education has become increasingly recognised by provincial departments of education as an important foundation for children's future learning,***

in fact, as part of basic education." (Brown et al., 1994, p 43). Nursery programmes for under fives are, in most provinces, privatised and not restricted by government guidelines with regards to curriculum or assessment. Parents are commonly charged fees for the nursery programmes with the result being that these programmes are accessed, for the most part, by families who can afford to pay. In cases where a child is considered "at risk" and in need of a nursery setting, Social Services may provide funding. Daycare is provided in all provinces and although the centres are privately run, they are subject to government guidelines with regards to programming and child/staff rations since parent fees may be subsidised by governments according to need.

Most provinces recognise that early childhood education is an important foundation for future learning. Along with this recognition comes the realisation that government funding must support early education. Paradoxically, in an attempt to reduce the provincial operating deficit, the province of Alberta has recently (1994) targeted education, and specifically early childhood education, as an area in which to substantially reduce government funding. British Columbia, with its model Year 2000 programme for education, is also experiencing uncertainty as a new government contemplates the value of a developmentally appropriate educational programme that provides for continuity in learning. As the people of Alberta and British Columbia struggle with these cutbacks, New Brunswick, one of the poorest provinces in terms of economic development and opportunity, has successfully implemented a kindergarten programme that provides universal access for its children.

Alberta

Alberta Education has, until the 1993 provincial election, provided funding for 400 annual hours of programming for five year-olds. The cabinet shuffle resulted in a new Minister of Education and an apparent decision to target education, particularly the early years, in an attempt to reduce the deficit. Although the compulsory school attendance age in Alberta remains at six, prior to this point, parents of five year olds who wished to send their children to kindergarten had that option, with government funding provided for public, Catholic and private programmes that met established criteria. Children with special needs were funded from age two and one half, dependent upon the nature of the needs. Prior to September, 1994, five year-olds could attend a kindergarten program four or five half days a week, during the school year. Teachers in these programmes are required to hold education degrees and some school districts insist on the additional qualification of a specialist diploma in early childhood education. Most of the kindergarten programmes in Alberta are managed under the authority of locally elected school boards, although private programmes run by parent boards still exist. All Early Childhood Services (ECS) programmes receiving government funding are monitored to ensure that they follow the *Philosophy, Goals and Program Dimensions* (1984) for ECS required by Alberta Education.

The start of the 1994 school year saw government funding reduced by 50 per cent, which resulted in a cut from 400 hours to 200 hours a year, although public lobbying of the Government resulted in an additional 40 hours funding for the 1995- 96 school year. The Minister of

Education stated in a January, 1994 press release, ***"the objectives of ECS (Early Childhood Services), to prepare children for formal learning, can be attained with less time in the classroom."*** As well, Special Program Unit Grants, for children under the age of six with multiple disabilities, were to be reduced by 7.5 percent over the next two years. School boards were left to find innovative ways to finance the shortfall of government funding, particularly if they remained committed to the importance of early childhood education. This meant, in many cases, that parents would be required to pay a surcharge, with the distinct possibility of resulting in a two-tiered system of early childhood education- those who could afford the supplemental fee and those who could not- thereby widening the already existing gap between families of different socio-economic status.

New Brunswick

The province of New Brunswick launched the first government-supported public kindergarten programme at the start of the 1991 school year. The play-based programme is voluntary, but reports in 1992 (Colleagues, 1992) indicate that approximately 90 percent of the province's five year-olds were in attendance. Although the compulsory school age is seven, most children begin before then. To be eligible for kindergarten children must turn five before December 31 of the year they begin school. Children enter kindergarten only in September of any particular school year.

Although this initiative was meant to benefit all children in New Brunswick, some drawbacks, particularly regarding the status and

professionalisation of the kindergarten teachers, are apparent. In order to provide adequate financial support to implement the programme, the government negotiated a severe rollback in the kindergarten teachers' salaries. This has resulted in an extremely young teaching force for the kindergarten programmes. Although it was the teachers' passion for the 'rightness' of providing universal kindergarten and, thus, their acceptance of the rollbacks, it means that these young teachers are less qualified than those teaching in the compulsory grades and they are likely to be in danger of being attributed a lower professional status than their colleagues in the later grades.

The overarching goal of the New Brunswick kindergarten programme is ***"to help the children develop their powers as fully as possible"*** (N.B. Department of Education, 1991, p. 2). Through experiences aimed at enhancing physical, intellectual and social/emotional development, the programme aspires are to have children leave kindergarten with:

> 1. undiminished curiosity, eager not only to explore, but to understand
>
> 2. enhanced communication powers, able to express and exchange ideas, feelings and experiences in a variety of ways
>
> 3. a new store of personally relevant knowledge and abilities
>
> 4. a growing capacity to focus attention, concentrate and persevere
>
> 5. increased confidence and self-esteem
> (N.B. Dept. of Education, op cit. p 2)

Whilst the specifics of programming are not mandated, a framework is provided to teachers with the intention of defining ***"the ingredients of positive development specifically enough to give direction to program methodology and content, yet broadly enough to encourage diversity"*** (N.B. Dept. of Education, op cit., p 5).

The Early Childhood Initiatives Programme, administered by the N.B. Department of Health and Community Services, co-ordinates an overall system of services for families and children considered to be at risk. Whenever possible, preventative interventions are begun during the prenatal period and carried through by various agencies as long as the need is apparent. Kindergarten is considered to be an important component of early intervention and is included in the spectrum of Early Childhood Initiatives and all age and residency eligible children are welcomed into kindergarten programmes. Pre-school programmes (including full and part-time care) are, for the most part, privately funded, although the government will subsidise care for low income families in need. Itinerant specialist teachers make home visits for children with visual and auditory impairments and advise staff in pre-school settings. With the universal availability of kindergarten, health screening for vision and hearing problems takes place in the kindergarten setting with the intent of identifying problems that may have been missed in earlier screenings. Using formal assessment tools, such as standardised tests and developmental screening tests, is discouraged. Ongoing assessment is encouraged with the purpose being to assess the progress of individual children in order to assist in future learning and to convey this information to parents.

Parents are encouraged to assist in the classroom and the N.B. Teacher's *Guide to Kindergarten* (New Brunswick, 1991) addresses the issue of parent involvement with suggestions to invite them to attend group evenings where they make kindergarten materials and to attend parent/teacher conferences, but there appears to be a lack of information addressing purposeful parent involvement. Whilst acknowledging the importance of parents as the first teachers of their children, any mention of how they can continue to assist in the learning process once their children begin school is cursory (i.e. inviting parents in as volunteers in the classroom). No mention is made of the establishment of parent advisory councils where parents can actually participate in making educational decisions, nor of providing opportunities for parents to learn about the principles and purpose of child-centred education. Advice for teachers in dealing with issues that involve parents such as recognising the need to respect individual values and differences of race, gender and culture is also lacking.

Britain

Provision for children in Britain under the compulsory school age of five is varied and sporadic. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) often provide funded nurseries in disadvantaged areas, leaving other families to choose from voluntary playgroups or private nurseries. Social Services also provides nursery spaces, but again, generally for children considered to be from disadvantaged families. Reception classes, meant to be the first year of schooling for five year olds, often accept, in some parts of the UK, children who are only four years old. Playgroups, run by the Pre-school Learning Alliance, offer places to children from two and one half to four years of age.

Despite the recommendations of the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) and subsequent government committees (White Paper "Framework for Expansion"- DES, 1972; House of Commons Select Committee of Members of Parliament, 1989) expansion of nursery provision for all children has not yet materialised. The 1990 Rumbold Report (HMSO) was commissioned to comment on aspects of continuity, content and progression in learning which may be affected by the diversity of children's needs and by demographic and social factors. The Report reiterated the need for co-operation and co-ordination amongst all stakeholders concerned with learning in the early years.

Pre-school provision in Britain, although not typical in any sense due to the diversity of provision and sometimes to the constraints of availability of facilities, usually focusses on developmentally appropriate activities throughout the day (David, 1993). Opportunities for fine and gross motor activities and exploration of the environment are interspersed with quiet times for reading, viewing and discussions. Some nurseries follow an adapted High/Scope model based on the American Perry Pre-school Project.

Whilst integration of students with special needs is encouraged, it is not always implemented where finances, staffing shortages and other local factors may preclude a fully integrated programme for these children (David, op cit.). Parents are involved in various ways in the education of their pre-school children. In LEA programmes, parents sit on the governing bodies and Parent/Teacher Committees. They are often involved in daily activities and assist on visits and field trips.

Several issues are currently of concern in Britain. Although the Britain has an anti-racist law, children from ethnic minority groups are often seen as disadvantaged. This disadvantage can broaden due to educators who may have difficulty understanding and dealing with multi-cultural problems. We know that early learning is more efficient within the context of one's own first language (David, op cit.). Children from a linguistically different background are often unlikely to have a teacher who shares and can stimulate their language development.

Another issue concerns the inappropriateness of accepting children under the compulsory school age in reception classes (Pascal and Bertram, 1993; David, 1993). Currently, over 70 per cent of children over the age of four and a half years are admitted to primary school. Often staffing and equipment are inadequate and, since the National Curriculum is followed, once a child enters primary school through reception classes, the experiences may be too structured to meet the needs of four year olds. In fact, a 'consultation' curriculum for under fives was scheduled to be released by the Department for Education and Employment during the summer of 1995.

The differences in teacher qualifications raise a third issue. Governments, and the British government is no exception, tend to reduce educational requirements for teachers as the age of the pupils becomes younger. "***Professionally trained early years teachers are rarely found in settings which provide for under-threes, and there is no requirement that this should be so***" (Pascal and Bertram, op cit., p 31). Although LEAs require professionally trained teachers for their nursery

programmes, the playgroups and private nurseries do not and the leaders often attend only courses of short duration in preparation for their positions.

The lack of a national policy for early childhood care and education, although it has resulted in choice for parents, has not resulted in access for all children. British government policy ***"is strong on central government control of the content of schooling yet weak on social equalisation through education on a European scale.***" (McClean, 1993, p 133). Only two in every 100 children have access to publicly funded child care facilities and the part-time nature of nursery provision adds additional concerns for working parents who need full-time care. David (1993) suggests that government commitment to provision for under-fives would allow more parents to join the workforce, reduce the numbers of single parents receiving social assistance benefits and add more tax revenue to the national coffers. The failure to develop a national policy for early childhood care and education encourages ***"fragmentation of services with different affiliations and philosophies (that) may not be in the best interests of all children in the UK***" (David, op cit., p 153).

The summer of 1995, in England, saw the government promising to institute a voucher system of nursery provision. Parents would be given vouchers that could be turned in for nursery provision either at Local Education Authority programmes, or at any of a number of private programmes. The system was to be operative in September of 1995, and was 'planned' for full implementation in 1997, although four LEAs ran a pilot of the system in 1996. The general feeling of the nation towards

this government initiative was a negative one. Not only would such a system encourage needless competition and fraud, it would deprive Local Education authorities of money with which they currently, and generously, support nursery provision. Not least of the drawbacks of a voucher system is the glaring lack of any mention of programme standards. These problems lead one to imagine a voucher system resulting in nursery provision that will resemble the patchwork kindergarten provision in Alberta and that fails to look at the needs of the children for which it is intended. Fortunately, for Britain, the voucher system was a temporary aberration that was discarded with the election of a new government in 1997.

Wales

Wales follows the National Curriculum, but certain emerging interests, mainly concerned with differences in cultural and linguistic heritage, have made an impact on the implementation of the curriculum. Although the Welsh language had lost its status by the 1600s, it survived dissolution into dialects due to the efforts of the Anglican liturgy, the Welsh bible and the Protestant apologetic literature (Morgan, 1993). In spite of this, the language continued to lose ground and the 1847 Royal commission, reporting on the state of education in Wales, blamed the lack of education provision and the growing unrest on the influence of the Welsh language and the nonconformity of the common people. The solution was to make the Welsh more "English". In other words, what was good for England was good for Wales. This solution created a deeper division between those in Welsh society who were willing to

conform and those who wanted to maintain their national identity.

"***In Wales, the movement of revival...grew out of a crisis in Welsh life when the very lifeblood of the nation seemed to be ebbing away...It required a superhuman effort by a small number of patriots to force their fellow countrymen to appreciate their heritage, to value what was their own. They felt that the only way to bring this about was to...create a new Welshness which would instruct, entertain, amuse and educate the people***" (Morgan, op cit., p 99).

The determination of many of the people to hold on to their cultural and linguistic heritage persists today as the Welsh continue to protect their identity. Bilingual signs and publications in Wales have sparked an awareness in those who may previously have been unaware of the intensity of the issue. In addition, the National Curriculum for children in Wales has been modified to include the study of Welsh literature and language. This modification has raised several issues. First, the inclusion and implementation of Welsh language into the curriculum was mandatory. It is only a minority of families who continue to speak Welsh in their homes as their first language and families in the north of Wales appear to be more receptive to the introduction of the language than families in the south.

A second issue concerns the preparation of teachers to teach the language. Although Key Stage I requires that Welsh be taught, it is suggested that the teaching of it be integrated into everyday teaching activities, wherever possible, in such informal situations as the taking of the register, the morning greetings and the introduction of the language through music. Teachers can generally cope with this informal requirement, even though the majority of them are not Welsh-speaking. The problem is magnified in Key Stage II when the

curriculum requirements become more intensive and the teachers are clearly not trained to present appropriate instruction in the language. Since most student teachers are English speaking and cannot be placed on practicuum in a school in Wales unless they are proficient in the Welsh language, placements must be found outside of Wales, usually in England, and teachers are graduated from Welsh universities and teacher training colleges without the language ability to present a mandatory part of the National Curriculum. The government **has** provided a substantial fund (£1.4 million in the south of Wales in contrast to £1.1 million designated for the entire curriculum development) for use in training working teachers in the Welsh language , but many situations remain where teachers as well as pupils speak only English.

Related to the issue of the lack of Welsh speaking teachers and pupils is the fact that the usefulness of being able to speak Welsh ends at the borders of Wales, and even within the borders, that usefulness is questionable. Perhaps a better solution would have been to offer the study of Welsh as an elective in most areas, but to provide, at the same time, the flexibility for Welsh speaking areas to increase emphasis on integrating the language wherever possible.

Wales faces many of the same problems of other countries in their quest to ensure quality provision and education in the early years. Financial cutbacks by government have resulted in fewer full-times places being available and a tendency for pre-school provision to be located only in areas where parents can afford to pay for it. The obvious problem with this is that those children from disadvantaged

homes are the least likely to receive early education. In addition, training for teachers and workers in early years (who are generally women) tends to be under emphasised and contributes to low professional status, with little power and voice for change. Services and funding are disjointed as a result of variation within and between authorities. Wales has the advantage of a close relationship between the Welsh Office and the local authorities, but these agencies need to "seize the initiative and shape policies for early years provision so they can form a coherent whole" (Davies, 1993). A coordinated effort by Children in Wales and ChwaraeTeg (of the Welsh-speaking movement) to increase affordable provision highlights the importance of the uniqueness of the Welsh situation.

Paralipomena

"The things omitted but which appertain and are put in as afterthoughts" (Bennett, 1994, p.334)

The interdependency of care and education cannot be denied, particularly as changes in traditional social conditions and economics imply the ever-increasing need for good quality child care from an early age. Since many children spend a large part of their day out of the home and in a care situation, the educational opportunities that were traditionally provided by parents, community and peers, through language development and broadening experiences of all aspects of life in the home and community, must now be assumed by the caregivers.

As I stated in the introduction, it appears that the quality of early childhood education may suffer with changes in government philosophical and funding priorities. Recent (1995a) OECD research, based on information provided by 17 countries, indicates that

'The expenditure allocated for preserving and developing this potential [children] ***must therefore be considered as a priority within the country's budget.'*** (Coombes, 1995, p 76)

The countries discussed in this chapter have, for the most part, embraced the philosophy behind the importance of early years educational provision. Subsequent chapters will provide research evidence supporting this philosophy, beginning with the next chapter, which examines the rationale behind the need for early intervention, specifically focussing on the development of a positive self-esteem, provision aimed at prevention of possible difficulties in the later years and the importance of parents and partnerships in learning. These three issues have become intertwined in the recent discussions surrounding

'quality' provision in the early years (Pascal, 1993; Skilbeck, 1993; Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993; Bertram and Pascal, 1994; Moss and Pence, 1994; Abbott and Roger, 1994; OECD, 1995).

Section II: The Importance of Early Learning Experiences

"...preschool can be an inoculation against failure." (Woodhead, 1985)

As I have stated in the introduction to this thesis, certain critical factors affect the quality of early learning experiences of young children. Three particular factors appear to me, from my own experience as a parent, teacher, administrator and researcher, to have a crucial impact on the effectiveness of early years provision and the impact it has on children's later learning. This section will focus on the importance of a positive self-esteem, on the importance of providing quality early intervention for children considered to be 'at risk' for a variety of reasons and on the importance of parent involvement from birth and continuing on in a partnership with the school and community in order to provide the best educational opportunities for young children.

Intervention in the form of early education, that is, education prior to the mandatory age of formal schooling, has long been used as a tool to help children considered to be 'at risk', for one or more of a variety of reasons, become useful, productive members of society (Alexander, 1993). Not only did Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori advocate early education, but their work, which combined theory and practice in the schools they established, influenced the educators and researchers in succeeding decades.

The Plowden Report hinted at the importance of early intervention, particularly relating to language development and suggested that ***"children who are brought up in a home background where the***

forms of speech are restricted are at a considerable disadvantage when they first go to school ...and may need to have considerable compensatory opportunities ..." (CACE, 1967, p 19). The Report goes on to stress the need to provide nursery education for children from socially deprived areas. Such nursery programmes would provide education in the form of ***"verbal stimulus, opportunities for constructive play, a more richly differentiated environment and access to medical care***." (CACE, op cit., p 63).

Bruner (1974, p. 453) cites a great deal of research, including that of Bernstein, indicating that intervention programmes grew out of perceived limitations of the linguistic environment of children from families considered to have a low socio-economic status (SES). Some of these limitations, according to the research, may be manifested in the so-called 'restricted' code of these families, for example, in the absence of apparent strategy in the games the children play; in the constant confusion of background noise in the home; in the lack of regular mutual parent/child interaction; or in the lack of parental instruction and guidance in setting goals.

To critique these deficiency theories, Bruner uses evidence from Labov's research which indicates that children can function very highly, linguistically, within the dialect and language code of their own culture. This would suggest that the tools used to assess the perceived deficiencies may have been inadequate and subject to the biases and restrictions common to many standardised tests. In addition, since test situations were often in unfamiliar surroundings, this may have prompted defensive behavior and

monosyllabic answers from the children. Nevertheless, compensatory education programmes were widely implemented in the 60s and 70s and are still used in the sense of "intervention" for children perceived to be 'at risk' due to problems that appear to be associated with low SES, with belonging to a single parent family or with diagnosed physical, emotional or intellectual weaknesses or delays. The terms "compensatory education" and "early intervention' survive and will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

Compensatory education focusses upon reducing the impact of social, emotional, physical and intellectual handicapping conditions in an attempt to maximize the progress for each child and promote a higher degree of success in life in general. Whilst many researchers tend to define compensatory education as an attempt to build a stronger foundation for future learning for 'disadvantaged children', disadvantage may be only in the eye of the beholder. Certainly **all** children from low socio-economic backgrounds are not 'disadvantaged' in the sense that they need compensatory education. Many parents in these families would appear perfectly able to provide the important elements of language learning, such as meaningful verbal interaction, response to actions, providing written materials and modelling reading and writing. As well, many low SES families clearly can manage the finances that they do have and, in fact, provide proper nutrition and care for their children. It is, therefore, those children who fit a number of identifiable criteria that are categorised as 'at risk' and who are thought to be best be served by an educational programme aimed at

intervening in their lives and providing support, both to the family and the child.

Considerable research (Bryant and Ramey, 1987; Weikart, 1993; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Zigler and Styfco, 1993; Fuerst and Petty, 1996) attests to the long term advantages of compensatory programmes and argues for the benefits of early intervention. Several aspects of compensatory programmes clearly warrant discussion since researchers and providers of such programmes often emphasise their relationship to the success of the programmes. For example, whilst the correlation between self-esteem and achievement is not straightforward for many researchers and educationists, the majority of compensatory programmes incorporate opportunities for enhancing self-esteem as an important element in their design and execution. In addition, research (Jarousse et al., 1991; Slavin, 1993) has shown that the length of time children spend in early intervention programmes and the age of entry into these programmes also have a bearing on their success.

Some research has shown that the intellectual benefits of some early intervention programmes tend to fade out over a period of time, but in fact, many researchers (Bryant and Ramey, 1987; Weikart, 1993, Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Zigler and Styfco, 1993; Fuerst and Petty, 1996) suggest that it is the broader benefits to society, in terms of raising self-esteem, raising the leaving age of school, reducing crime, reducing the impact of handicapping conditions and reducing the need for Social Services assistance that

provide hard evidence for the cost effectiveness of early intervention in education. Research evidence (Powell, 1989; Jarousse et al., 1991; Skilbeck, 1993; Fuerst and Petty, 1996) clearly indicates that these societal factors are minimised with the provision of continuous, quality early education programmes of a developmental nature from the age of two or three. Sylva and Wiltshire (1993) concur that early education, beginning no later than three years of age, fosters effective learning at later stages of growth. This section will examine the rationale for long-term commitment to early education, not only for children considered to be 'at risk' for a variety of reasons, but for all children in terms of the changes in family structure and socio-economic conditions. These changes directly impact the provision in early years that has traditionally been separated into care and education.

"***Parents are a child's first and most important teachers***" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1992). The importance of parents in the education of their children is not a phenomenon of the 20th century but has been long recognised and valued. Section I has pointed out the emphasis which the early Puritan writers put on the importance of the family influence in building a foundation for learning. "***Children, in their first days, have the greater benefit of good mothers...receiving their first impressions from them***" Robinson wrote in 1628 (Greven, 1973 p. 11). And from Abbott in 1833 "***And since, in nearly every instance, the early years of life are entrusted to a mother's care, it follows that maternal influence, more than anything else, forms the future character***" (Greven, p. 118). Bushnell continued to emphasise

the importance of parents. He wrote, in 1847,

> ***So when a child during the whole period of impressions or passive recipiencies previous to the development of his responsible will, lives in the life and feeling of his parents...they will, of course, be shaping themselves in him, or him in themselves and the effects wrought in him will be preparations of what he will be and do by himself; seeds in that manner possible even of a regenerate life and character.*** (Greven, p 165)

The recognition of the family and parents as the child's first teachers has continued through the years. Chapter 1 of Section I discussed the early educators (from Pestalozzi to Isaacs and on to the contemporary influences of the Plowden Report and the NAEYC) who recognised not only the benefits of early childhood education as a foundation for future learning, but the impact that parents have on their children's learning.

Upon the birth of a child, parents begin their teaching journey, first attending to the sensorimotor needs by provision not only of the basic requirements of food and warmth, but with cuddling, touching, talking and exposing their babies and, later, toddlers to stimulating activities and objects in the environment. It is during the period of early infancy, characterised by rapid physical and intellectual growth, that parents' interactions with their children support and stimulate that growth. Primary emotional relationships that foster further development are established (Lambie and Weikart, 1970). As children gain a measure of mobility and begin to speak, parents continue to teach their children, helping them to make meaning from the environment by providing them with concrete experiences upon which future learning will be based and with models for language development.

Chapter 5 in this section will address the critical nature of familial and community environments with respect to parents' initial involvement as their children's first teachers and the importance of language development in the early years as a basis for making meaning of new experiences. Chapter 6 will examine the relationship between children's success in school and the continuing involvement of parents in a partnership with schools.

Chapter 3: The Importance of a Positive Self-Concept

"It is vital to remember that we are changing children! ...we are training them to be outgoing, questioning, curious, sensitive, responsive, active, imaginative and ambitious." (Lambie and Weikart, 1970)

Many would argue that the main focus of early intervention programmes should be on prevention, particularly with current medical technology and knowledge about how children develop and learn. But some conditions, such as congenital birth defects, cannot yet be prevented. Nor can some of society's conditions, such as differences in environments due to differences in SES or family structure be easily avoided. Therefore, it is imperative that early intervention programmes be concerned with reducing the impact that these impairing conditions may have (Hayden, 1978). The efforts of schools to cope with children 'at risk' need to be comprehensive, flexible and sensitive to varying needs. Children come into school from different backgrounds and with different expectations of what school is about, but teachers may teach a generalised, mandated 'curriculum' that has little meaning for a child 'at risk' in terms of the needs of the impairing condition.

Early Childhood programmes for children considered to be "at risk" (whatever the cause) have been in existence since Pestalozzi and Froebel first began their schools. Although such programmes tended to focus on providing opportunities and experience for disadvantaged children, today's changing societal values, traditions and circumstances point to the need to offer early education for **all** children, regardless of socio-economic status or handicapping conditions. But, paradoxically, this is at a time when **some** governments are working to reduce huge

deficits, targeting early education as an ideal area in which to cut funding. This in an era when researchers are providing clear evidence of the cost-effectiveness of good quality, accessible early years educational provision! Basing their comments on the work of Hunt and Bloom in the 1960s, Guralnick and Bennet (op. cit.) suggested that a large proportion of children will be adversely affected by environmental conditions that may not be conducive to providing a firm foundation for future learning. Even if the effects are reversible, they continue, it "***may require extraordinary, costly efforts in order to restore the developmental level to its optimal course later***" (p. 19).

Many components of early childhood education are associated with enhancing the cognitive, social, physical and personal development of young children. Children can be disadvantaged because of many factors that may be based in physical or mental disabilities or delays, or in a social construct often related to low SES or single parenthood. Some children from lower income families, and these very often include single parent families, may miss out on obvious common experiences to which middle class children are exposed. Their homes may lack in appropriate language stimulation and the provision of books, magazines and other reading materials. Since education may not have been the key to success in many disadvantaged families, some families may place a very low value on it. This could result in low self-esteem, a lack of motivation and initiative and a lack of communication skills that are the foundation for reading and writing.

Low self-esteem, lack of motivation and initiative are often linked to children's academic success. Research evidence indicates that

"***Children enter school with a predisposition towards achievement or failure***" (Burns, 1982, p 201). In fact, it is in ***the "lack of achievement press in the family system (that) has been identified as significantly absent or diminished in families that have a very long history of operating at or below the poverty level"*** (Peters et al., 1991, p. 95). In his review of major studies examining the correlation between academic achievement and self-esteem, Burns (op. cit. p 226) cites the consistent message found in the research that ***"differences in academic performance are associated with differences in self-concept level.***" It almost becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy" as children with a low self-concept often perceive themselves as unable to achieve academically and, predictably, often fulfill that perception.

Self-Concept

Although Head Start programmes came in for a great deal of criticism when they began the mid-1960s, it was the emphasis on promoting a positive self-esteem in the children involved that produced some of the main evidence which encouraged government commitment to early intervention in education.

There are major differences in the perspectives of psychologists with regards to the formation of self-concept, but a growing body of research (Katz, 1988; Lawrence, 1988; Dowling, 1992; Roberts, 1995) points to the implications that a positive self-esteem has on learning. Gammage (1982, p. 189) cites Maslow's (1954) views on the importance of a positive self-concept***: "Satisfaction of the self-esteem needs leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world.***" The

jargon of today may have changed, but the essence remains the same- that "***High self-esteem results from a positive self-concept and the acceptance of oneself as a worthwhile person.***"(Alberta Education, 1984, p 2)

"***The self-concept is learned, it is not innate***" (Burns, 1982, p 31). Instead, it is derived from all the influences of one's environment, including the continual bombardment of sounds, smells, sights and tactile experiences. Each individual's perception of these experiences is unique. It is generally accepted by psychologists that the family plays a significant role in the development of a child's self-concept (Burns, op cit.). In his review of several major studies of familial factors relating to the development of a child's positive self-concept, Burns highlights the following as significant indicators:

- A balance between permissiveness and authoritarianism. Children who come from families where discipline is used consistently and democratically appear to have clear clues about the "right" way to behave. They appear less anxious about parental response to their behaviour and more confident in their own limitations and decision-making abilities.

- A balance between interest and indifference. Parents' disinterest in their children's world (social, academic or otherwise) has been shown to have negative and debilitating effects on the children's self-concept. Interestingly enough, ***"criticism and punishment is less damaging than outright indifference***" (Burns, op cit. p 104).

- Affection. Although families will vary in the degree of affection in the interaction of parent and child, it is the overshadowing of any affection by hostility that damages the child's self-concept.

Burns concludes that interpersonal relationships within the family unit are far more significant than such societal factors as social class, religion or ethnicity.

A child's self-concept encompasses perceptions and interpretations of himself or herself in relation to the world. Amongst other things, it includes feelings of being good or bad, able or unable, successful or a failure, liked or disliked. Self-concept is learned and, almost from the moment of birth, the process of its development continues as the child faces new experiences and interacts with significant people in his or her life. Self-concept develops as the child internalises and reflects upon these experiences and interactions. A great deal of the child's early self-concept develops as a result of learning experiences with and expectations of the parents and significant others in the home. The subtlety of the child/adult interactions during infancy and early childhood communicate a sense of being valued. It depends upon ***"...the close and frequent association between the reduction of physiological needs and feelings of being valued.***" (Gergen, 1971, p 68). The caressing and fondling associated with feeding and caring and the warm looks and affectionate talk communicate to the child a feeling of pleasure, of being valued and esteemed.

Gergen's (1971) studies have shown that people are more apt to accept feedback about themselves, to use it constructively and to identify with their own roles more completely when the feedback is positive. A low self-esteem is not necessarily produced through failure to achieve, rather it is the way that the significant others in a child's life react to the failure (Lawrence, 1988). Katz (1994, cited by Wilce) suggests that

the real foundation of a positive self-esteem is the ability to "deal with setbacks, and maintain the persistence and optimism necessary for children's long road to mastery...". She goes on to state that heaping excessive praise on every small accomplishment may not be conducive to the development of a positive self-esteem and may actually hinder learning. Empty praise does not encourage children to be explorers, experimenters, problem-solvers or constructors of their own learning. A high self-esteem requires that the significant others in children's lives respect their opinions, empathise with their failures and encourage them to continue in spite of setbacks. It appears that it is the manner in which the feedback is presented that promotes a positive self-esteem.

Lawrence (1988) explains the relationships between self-concept, self-image, the ideal self and self-esteem, terms which have often been used to mean the same thing. He sees self-concept as an umbrella term, encompassing self-image- "Here is what I am"- and the ideal self- "Here is what I would like to be." The child uses these two to interpret the discrepancies between them and thus form a level of self-esteem. Lawrence cites considerable research which indicates that there is a positive correlation between levels of self-esteem and academic achievement. High self-esteem generally results in a child who is confident in the social situations of the school, who has a natural curiosity for learning and is eager to tackle school work and to rise to a challenge. The child with low self-esteem may lack confidence in his or her ability to succeed with the demands of school and, therefore, may try to avoid situations which appear to be potentially and personally humiliating. Gergen (op cit., p 2) sums up the importance

of self-esteem : ***"...the way in which a man conceives himself will influence both what he chooses to do and what he expects from life."***

The apparent benefits of promoting a positive self-concept in children in order to enhance their learning suggest that children need not be doomed to failure. Other factors may also figure in preventing early school failure. Since patterns of low self-esteem are often difficult to overcome and may result in a lack of internal motivation for academic achievement, schools would be wise to plan intervention programmes aimed at developing self-esteem, particularly for 'at risk' populations (Ingraham, 1988). Researchers and educators are well aware of the impact that parents have, not only on the development of self-concept, but on the accumulation of experience and knowledge that a child brings to formal education.

Guralnick and Bennett (1987) suggest that infants and children at increased environmental risk due to poverty, low socio-economic status, and/or being raised by a single or adolescent parent may need early intervention services aimed at assisting the parents or guardians to provide appropriate experiences and interactions that will build a solid foundation on which to base future learning.

The work, with five to seven year olds, of Gottfried et al. (1988, p 13) has shown that "***Children's cognitive, academic and social developments from infancy through the school years are positively related to children's proximal home environment***". In considering the educational stimulation provided by the mother, the educational expectations and attitudes of the mothers and the provision of learning

materials in the home, they found that career mothers had higher aspirations for their children, more out-of school-lessons were provided and both mother and child watched less television. In addition, these families tended to display a greater cohesiveness within the family unit and their recreational activities tended to have a more intellectual, cultural and active orientation. The significant predictors in their study were the home environment and socio-economic status. It appears, therefore, that the interpersonal relationships within the family and the physical stimulation that a child receives through environmental interactions have an influential impact on the developing cognitive, social and emotional skills.

Motivation and initiation stem not only from modeling and identifying with parents, but also within the level of parent interest and involvement in their children's learning. Encouragement and support enhance self-esteem. Some researchers (Burns, 1982; Peters et al, 1991) have suggested that the parents' own low self esteem may result in feelings of powerlessness and inferiority. These feelings, in turn, may affect the home and school relationships of the child and may depress achievement expectations and effort. In an effort to raise pupil motivation levels and increase their self-esteem, many compensatory programmes attempt, through parent education programmes, to empower parents to become more active in the process of education, both at home and at school.

Since research evidence (Burns, 1982; Gammage, 1982; Widlake and MacLeod, 1984; Lawrence, 1988) clearly shows the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement it is vital that the

educational system does its utmost to ensure that formal education enhances self-esteem. In addition to the home environment in the early years, the school is probably the next most important force in developing a child's self-concept. The home and school are the prominent environments of a young child and "***In particular, it does appear that the child's concept of self and the beliefs that both the parents and the teacher communicate to the child about his or her competence as a learner, are critical.***" (Black, 1994, p 3). Again, it is the child's perception of his acceptance and relationships at school that affect self-esteem. Often it is the subtle implications, possibly even unwitting, at times, on the part of the teacher, that can affect self-concept. Some of the research evidence suggests that, often, children with a low self-esteem may have suffered from "a lack of parental guidance and relatively harsh and disrespectful treatment" (Gammage, 1971, p 59).

Whilst damage to a child's self-esteem may have occurred, in many cases, in the home, schools must continue to be concerned with developing positive self-concepts in children. It is particularly important for children with low self-esteem to be given an additional view of themselves that includes competence, worth and belonging and ***"the appreciation and understanding of ...emotions, temperament, interests and attitudes...***" (Gammage, 1971, p 53). Pre-school experiences can encourage social responsibility and a positive self-image. These, in turn, become positive advantages for the learner upon entering formal schooling (Black, op cit.)

The school should be concerned with two inter-related aspects in the development of a positive self-concept in children. The first concerns the prevention or reduction of a negative self-concept. The second, the enhancement of a positive one. Both are realised essentially through the same process; however, changing negative feelings about oneself becomes an infinitely more difficult process. It stands to reason that prevention is better than a cure, and an empathetic, caring, facilitative learning environment can do much to encourage a positive self-concept. As the child passes through the learning phases of exploring, constructing and communicating learning (Alberta Education, 1993), the teacher, by encouraging and accepting exploration, does a great deal to enhance the child's self-concept. The next phase of constructing new learning based on prior experiences and additional information needs a positive, constructive response by the teacher. And, finally, the teacher facilitates the learning as the child communicates outcomes.

Compensatory education, in the form of early intervention programmes can provide information and workshop situations that may convince parents of the importance of enhancing their child's self-concept. In addition, the importance of parental contributions to the development of a positive self-concept is recognised by educators and researchers throughout the world. If one believes in the strength of these contributions, then parent support for children suffering from a low self-concept is a worthwhile goal. Many parents, having been raised in similar situations to those in which they are raising their own children, have had limited opportunities to observe and receive positive constructive feedback to behaviors, attitudes and activities. According

to Katz (1984), the major goals of parent education programmes should be to assist parents in thinking through their own expectations for their children, to develop, and change if necessary, an appropriate lifestyle for the family and to assist in identifying issues within the family unit that may need attention. Chapter 4 attempts to provide a rationale for ensuring early childhood provision is universally available, particularly for those children considered to be 'at risk'.

Chapter 4: Enhancing opportunities for children 'at risk'

"***Prevention is the earliest intervention.***" (Hayden, 1978)

The benefits of a positive self-concept and the impact of the home on the development of a positive self-concept have been discussed in Chapter One. The home is often seen as an important factor in children considered to be 'disadvantaged' and likely to experience failure at school. Rather than describe these children as 'disadvantaged', the term 'at risk' is becoming more commonly used (OECD, 1995) since it implies the distinct possibility of reducing the risk factors which may cause difficulties in the future.

> ***The term "at risk" emphasises future prospects. It is a predictive concept which assumes that children and pupils "at risk" have certain characteristics which allow them to be identified but that these characteristics only become a problem when they meet events and conditions that have yet to occur."*** (Evans, 1995b, p 18)

With the recognition that there is a future for children considered to be "at risk", comes the clear implication that the school, the family and the community must work together in an attempt to reduce the effect of identified risk factors and to meet the needs of these children.

In a major American review of early school failure and intervention programmes, Slavin et al. (1993) have identified several important features that warrant consideration if educational provision in the early years is to provide "at risk" children with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. Enhancing reading skills with one-to-one tutoring programmes such as Reading Recovery was found to improve reading scores substantially and to reduce the need for special education

placements. The authors also highlight the impact of early intervention programmes with children from birth to three years of age. Since these first few years of life are so critical in terms of the amount of learning and experience that is accumulated by a child, programming and support for parents during this period has been found to be an important indicator of the success of intervention programmes. In addition, the extension of appropriate programming for "at risk" children into preschool was also an important feature for future success. The issue, though, is that for intervention to be effective, it must be continuous. A one-year "shot-in-the-arm" approach will not provide the support and continuity that a child needs to ensure a higher degree of success, both socially and academically. As Slavin (op cit., p 17) points out ***"By every standard of evidence, logic and compassion, dollars used preventively make more sense than the same dollars used remedially***."

Since the purpose of schooling, ideally, is to promote learning, it is reasonable to expect that an emphasis on early learning will help to provide the foundations that may be lacking in many children who suffer from the disadvantages of handicapping conditions, poverty or low self-esteem. In addition to intervention as a measure of prevention, early detection of handicapping conditions can result in appropriate early intervention programmes designed to reduce the effects of disadvantage, physical, social or emotional disabilities. Compensatory programmes are meant to 'equalise' educational opportunities for **all** children, capitalising on the experience they have already had and enhancing further language development and interactions with the environment.

Educators and researchers have long been aware of the correlation between socio-economic status and achievement at school. Statistics from California (Riles, 1970) indicate that a child from a disadvantaged background falls behind in academic progress at the rate of three months for every school year.

Thus, at the end of the third year of school, a disadvantaged child may be"...***already a full year behind the middle-class student and when he enters his teenage years, he is two years behind and about to become a statistic- a dropout.***" (Riles, op cit., p 269). Traditionally, dropouts have been explained in terms of their own failure to succeed in school. Realistically, dropouts mirror the failure of governments to recognise the importance of early education and to provide funding that ensures access from the early years to programmes that focus on the provision of rich experiences and opportunities which will provide a foundation for future learning.

Many of the studies identify young boys themselves as a specifically "at risk" group. Since the focus on gender equity has come to the forefront of societal issues, researchers have pointed out the lack of achievement by girls in the areas of maths and science. But a concerted effort in recent years has proven worthwhile, as girls are now indeed meeting and often surpassing boys in these areas. Whilst the push to encourage more participation by girls in maths and science has been paramount, the lack of success by boys in the areas of language learning is, sadly, apparent. Recent British (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996) and American (Dean, 1994) research suggests that

disproportionate numbers of boys are falling behind in basic literacy skills. If gender equity is to be truly addressed, then more research is needed into the reasons why boys have difficulty in language learning. Perhaps, then boys, as girls have in maths and science, can be provided with the appropriate programming to enhance their performance in communication skills and literacy. Gender equity will have real meaning when "the same opportunities and the same amount of attention to girls as to boys allows both sexes to thrive without one gender's success being at the expense of the other" (Boworowsky, 1994).

Early education programmes do not presume to "catch up" all the children who are involved, but the gap between children of disadvantage (for whatever reason) and children from the mainstream of society can be narrowed. In order for the gap to narrow, compensatory education whilst focussing on the needs of the individual child, must have adequate financial support from governments in terms of more money, more resources, smaller pupil:teacher ratios and flexible curricula that will meet the needs of children who are economically, environmentally, physically or emotionally "at risk". In addition to financial support, early intervention programmes, in order to reach their maximum effectiveness, must begin at an early age and continue through the elementary school years. California findings (Riles, op cit.) have shown that the most significant gains for disadvantaged children are throughout the years of primary schooling. These findings have been confirmed more recently (Lubeck, 1989) with evidence from follow-up evaluations of pre-school programmes that indicate long-term benefits for children from low economic

backgrounds. Fewer of these children were classified as mentally retarded when they entered compulsory school; fewer have out-of-wedlock babies; fewer were arrested for crimes against people and property; and more were likely to complete high school, attend college and hold jobs.

In their analysis of the effectiveness of 17 compensatory education programmes for environmentally at risk children, Bryant and Ramey (1987) found significant intellectual benefits in the children involved when a compensatory programme was begun during the pre-school years. The largest intellectual improvement was seen in children who attended centres with a distinct emphasis on parental education as well as children's programming. Although conceding that policy makers may balk at the provision of expensive early years education, they found that it was the long-term intensity of early intervention programmes that resulted in the most significant gains in the children's intellectual levels of performance. Bryant and Ramey conclude from their investigations that ***"intellectual development can potentially be influenced by systematic efforts aimed at a variety of modes***" (p 75) in the lives and social interactions in young children and their caregivers.

Schweinhart and Weikart (1994) have followed the participants of the High/Scope Perry Pre-school Project for almost three decades. The participants, defined as "people living in poverty", were followed into adulthood and most recently assessed in 1993 at the age of 27. Compared to a group who received no pre-school programme, the project participants had fewer arrests, earned higher salaries and accessed Social Services less. In addition, more of the project

participants owned a house. The educational performance of the project group was significantly higher in general literacy at the age of 19 and they had spent significantly fewer years in school remedial programmes.

Amongst the conclusions that the authors have reached is the importance of the development of social attitudes that allowed the participants to interact more positively within the school and the community. The research also highlighted the cost-effectiveness of the project:

The lifetime economic benefits to the pre-school program participants, their families and the community far outweigh the economic cost of their high-quality, active learning pre-school program. If this program had not been offered, the direct costs to society in lost labor-force participation, increased criminal behavior and additional welfare support would have far exceeded the program cost." (Schweinhart and Weikart, op cit., p 99)

The authors concede that the Perry Pre-school Project "***provided participants with a partial 'inoculation' against the negative effect of poverty, (but) it cannot be said that the pre-school program in any sense offered a 'cure' for the problems of poverty.***" (p 99). They go on to stress that it is the high quality of the programme that is finally responsible for the effects on the participants and their lives. Four aspects of high-quality programming are defined by Schweinhart and Weikart: (op cit. p 99)

"***a developmentally appropriate, active learning curriculum; an organized system of in-service training and systematic, ongoing***

curriculum supervision; an efficient workable method of parent inclusion and involvement; good administration including a valid and reliable developmentally appropriate assessment procedure, a monitoring system and a reasonable child/adult ratio."

In the preface to Widlake and Macleod's book (1984, p iii), Midwinter states that, in his view, ***"...the only method of raising the levels of educational performance to a higher plateau is by enlisting and equipping the parents and other adults in our society to provide a more fitting locus for the children***". Very simply, he is saying that involving parents in schooling is likely to result in enhanced performance by the children. Widlake and Macleod (op cit, p 42) suggest that "***nursery education by itself cannot close the gap***" that may have been created by socio-economic status. Their study examined the results of oral and written language performance and reading comprehension after involving working-class parents in the learning process.

The results of their study clearly pointed to the crucial role of the school in promoting parent involvement. Parents were involved, not only with providing home assistance to their children, but through school meetings, personal contact initiated by the school, book awareness displays, assemblies, provision of a community library and pre-reading and early reading workshops aimed at making parents more aware of the reading process. This systematic involvement of parents had a positive effect on the children in the study and clearly indicated to the schools that there are effective ways of involving parents and staff, even in disadvantaged areas. Whilst it would be difficult to effectively replicate this particular study model in **all** other

schools, it appears that some schools may be more effective in this approach due to the degree of commitment to parent involvement. In effect, it is probably the **nature** of the parent/school partnership, not just a superficial attempt at involvement, that is the true indicator in enhancing children's achievement through parental involvement.

There is a growing acceptance by governments, particularly many of those in continental Europe (France, Spain and Belgium, for example) who appear to be at the forefront of early years provision, of the importance of preschool education as a preventative measure. Research clearly indicates that the ***"the financial costs of providing long-term remedial services after a student has already failed are staggering, but even more tragic are the consequences for individual children who fail so early"*** (Slavin et al., 1993. p 10). One can only speculate on the economic and social outcomes of these children as they leave school and enter (or not) the workforce, since they may not have had opportunities during the crucial early years to assimilate and internalise important concepts that form the basis for much of later learning. Certainly, the costs of providing remediation in the later years of school escalate as the child advances in years. Notwithstanding the importance of the quality of preschool education, two factors appear to be most significant in the provision of early intervention programmes.

First, early childhood programmes are more likely to be successful when there is effective parental involvement (Hayden, 1978; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Ball, 1994). Fullan (1991, p 227) says "***The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on***

child development and educational achievement." Research (Fullan, op cit.) clearly shows that even after family socio-economic status and pupil ability are taken into account, personal and academic gains are greater in children whose parents take an active role in the schooling and education of their children. The recognition of the importance of parent involvement is widespread, but the paradigm shift concerns the change ***from "educating parents to supporting parents, and in the process, enabling them to contribute as well as to receive, thus creating a real dialogue***" (MacPherson, 1993, p 65).

Second, the earlier educational provision is begun, the more lasting and influential the benefits will be. It is this recognition, backed by substantial research (Bryant and Ramey, 1987; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Sylva, 1994a; Fuerst and Petty, 1996) that must be addressed and accepted by governments. Although research (Guralnick and Bennet, 1987; King et al., 1994; Schweinhardt and Weikart, 1994) has tended to concentrate on the advantages of early intervention programmes to children considered 'at risk' for any number of reasons, to isolate these children from their peers in society and provide specialised programmes only for a particular group may foster racial and economic segregation, unacceptance and unawareness of multicultural diversity and unequal opportunities for **all** children, regardless of their status in society. With more mothers joining the workforce necessitating earlier entry into out-of-home care for young children, the question of a need for long term commitment by government and educators becomes one of paramount importance.

The following chapter examines the importance of environment and experiences on child development in the early years. It addresses the need for parents and providers of care and education to continue in a partnership to ensure that the experiences traditionally gained in the environment of the home and community continue to be offered to young children, as more and more, they spend longer periods of time in care situations outside of the home.

Chapter 5: Environment and Experience

"Early educational experience begins in the home and the quality of that experience is vital." (Chazan, 1982, p 31)

From the wealth of research that preceded the 1980's, came many documents (Hunt, 1961; CACE, 1967) stressing the importance of parents, not only in meeting the basic needs of their children, but in providing the environmental and language stimulation on which to base future learning. Parents can and do make a significant contribution to the learning of their young children (MacPherson, 1993). It is the experiences of the early years, experiences enhanced by continual and meaningful involvement and interaction with their environment that set the pace for future learning (Hunt, 1961; Chazan, 1982). Brierley (1987) uses evidence from brain research to demonstrate the potential, flexibility and resilience of the brain, highlighting the critical importance of experience during the developing years from birth to eight and asserting ***"...a good environment is not a luxury but a necessity during the early years of life"*** (p 31). During these formative years, Brierley contends, the "***ability to learn is at flood readiness***" (p 29) and the quality of environmental interactions is critical. He also suggests that psychologists' estimates of substantial intellectual growth by age four lend credence to Charles Darwin's comment that the first three years of a child's life are the three years in which he learns the most.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1990, p 22) places strong emphasis on the fact that early learning provides a foundation for future learning: "***Children who come to school with a history of rich experiences... have a rich***

background of firsthand experience upon which later learning can be based." The continuity of early years experiences and responses by parents to action are more likely to result in generalisation by children when they encounter new situations (Wachs-Gruen, 1982; Guralnick and Bennett, 1987). They will explore, interact, continually probe and seek to solve problems and create interactive, stimulating environments within which they can continue to build upon their prior experiences. The basic premise of the NAEYC's statement (1987, p 4) that "***Learning activities and materials should be concrete, real and relevant to the lives of young children***" is supported by government programme guidelines in most of the countries discussed in this thesis.

In this context, it is instructive to examine The Early Education Project, initiated by the Froebel Institute (Athey, 1990) to study the development of thinking in young children. This expressly highlights the importance of experience in the early years and specifically refers to the development of concepts and schemas connected to environmental interactions during field trips and visits to community places and events. Athey pointed out that it was not the visit itself that automatically conferred new learning upon the child, but the opportunities for hands-on experiences and stimulating interactions and responses by adults that encouraged and extended thinking and problem-solving skills. The Project clearly identified an increase in interactive conversation, not only with the children involved, but with the parents, as well.

Gill and Gill(1993) recognise that the influence of family life is crucial to supporting growth and development in the early years and that

traditional, intact families are suffering from decreased paternal influence due to illegitimacy, divorce or desertion. In addition, as families strive to remain financially solvent in times of increased economic pressures, more and more mothers are seeking work outside the home, leaving their pre-school children in the care of others. They pose an interesting solution to child care in the early years in the United States- a solution that would allow children to benefit from the early educational environment of the home that is critical to success in school.

In order to strengthen family life for children, Gill and Gill suggest the introduction to the American Congress of a Parental Bill of Rights. This Bill would essentially encourage one parent to remain out of the workforce and at home during the formative years of their children's lives, thus providing "an extremely important social service"(p 91). In return for the lost opportunities in income and career advancement, parents would be compensated, when their children began school, with subsidisation for further education, so that they could re-enter, or enter for the first time, the workforce more effectively.

The success of the G.I. Bill, adopted after World War II and resulting in over 19 million Americans taking advantage of subsidised Higher Education or other types of training which enhanced their career prospects, has prompted the suggestion, by Gill and Gill, of the Parental Bill of Rights. The G.I. bill provided educational opportunities for returning veterans, who served their country whilst their education was disrupted or their careers were halted. If a Parental Bill of Rights was adopted, one could hope for the same expansion of

workers more adequately prepared to enter the labour force and, most importantly, children would reap the benefits of family life in the early years.

Although Gill and Gill advocate the value of one parent staying home during the pre-school years to provide the necessary experiential opportunities to ensure success at school, recent longitudinal studies of maternal employment and child development (Gottfried et al, 1988; Lerner and Galambos, 1987) challenge that belief. These studies indicate that the effects of maternal employment on children's academic and social skills appear to have little or no bearing on children's development in the pre-school years. Moreover, the outcomes of the research indicate that it is the **behavior** of the parents that plays a central role in the intellectual development of their children (Katz, 1984). Gottfried et al. found two distinct trends in their research. First, ***"...maternal employment proved to be non-significant in its relationship to children's development from infancy through the school-entry years."*** In fact, they found that socio-economic status and home environment had a greater impact than maternal employment. Second, ***"...maternal employment status (was) ...significantly, positively and independently related to educational attitudes at ages 5 and 7."*** This, they concluded, was due to the high educational aspirations that working mothers had for their children, to the increase in out-of-school lessons that working mothers arranged for their children and to the fact that both working mothers and their children watched fewer hours of television than did families with unemployed mothers.

Lerner and Galambos (op cit.) also found that maternal employment did not adversely affect children's development. Instead, they found that the home environment and the quality of parent-child relationships was more likely to "lead to more optimal child outcomes". They propose a "process of influence" model based on their speculations that "***maternal role satisfaction leads to more positive mother-child interactions, that, in turn, enhance child development.***" The model, linking maternal role satisfaction- mother/child interaction-child development suggests that it is the **quality** of the interactions at play within the family that influences development in early childhood.

Contrary to Lerner and Galambos, Bogenschneider and Steinberg (1994) found that maternal employment did, in fact, affect achievement, but only in a select group. They found that maternal employment was a critical factor in diminished school achievement in boys from white, middle-class, intact families. Their findings replicated other studies that pointed to lower academic achievement in boys from highly educated families, particularly when their mothers were employed during the pre-school years. The authors found that "***the effects of maternal employment on academic achievement are less pronounced if the mother begins work after the child enters school than if she does so earlier in the child's development***" (Bogenschneider and Steinberg, op cit., p 62), but these effects tended to "wash out" as the child grew older. In an attempt to explain the lower achievement in this particular group of boys, the authors speculate that families with high profile careers concentrate more on their own busy lives, thereby reducing the quality of interaction and the time spent with their children. The disruptions in normal parenting

practices that occur when mothers begin to work outside the home in the pre-school years appear to have a larger effect on the white middle-class boys than on the other groups in the study, that is, on black children, girls and children from low socio-economic backgrounds or those from single parent families.

Changes in traditional family structure due to migrations, mothers joining the workforce, increased incidence of single parent families, families with fewer children and the gradual disappearance of extended families have resulted in a reduction of the scope and variety of the child's relationships (UNESCO, 1989). Although changes in economics, politics, ideologies and religious beliefs have all affected the notion of the traditional, two-parent, two-child family, Postman (1983) describes the women's liberation movement as having one of the most devastating effects on the power of the family. As women become more and more able to pursue careers and interests outside the home, - in business, the arts, industry and the professions- Postman (op cit. p 151) argues that ***"...there must be a serious decline in the strength and meaning of traditional patterns of child care. For whatever criticisms may be made of the exclusive role of women as nurturers, the fact is that it is women, and women alone who have been the overseers of childhood, shaping it and protecting it***". Along with the nurture of children, it has traditionally been mothers who have also encouraged and stimulated the development of language learning.

Although Postman is somewhat ambivalent towards the possibility of a movement that would encourage fathers to participate, to a larger degree, in the nurturing role of the home, my own observation of

fathers in Canada and England in the 90s leads me to believe that they have become much more involved in the care and education of their children. Elkind (1995) whilst acknowledging that mothers still do the 'lion's share' of child rearing and homemaking, supports the notion that fathers are beginning to take a larger role. But, families are being transformed by the influences of changes that appear to necessitate the rethinking of the traditional notions of the nuclear family and whilst this involvement may not yet be at a level equal to that of the traditional involvement- and, in many cases, continuing involvement despite the mother's additional pressures of a full-time career- of the mother, it seems to be a step in the right direction, although, certainly, in need of additional research to verify my perceptions.

Children are growing up in a very different world from that of even twenty years ago. Within the context of this different world, Boyer (1991) has suggested all children should come to school "ready to learn". Notwithstanding the ambiguity of this statement, since, in fact, all children are probably ready to learn from the moment of birth, it is the degree of readiness that is most certainly influenced by the child's environment, particularly the home, in the early years.

Change is continual and, as part of the human condition, inevitable, but societal changes necessitate changes in the provision of education. Education often faces a dual dilemma. There is a strong push towards empowering parents to become more involved in all aspects of education, whilst at the same time, schools may equate children's failure with a lack in the home environment and may attempt to compensate at the school for these. Whilst families need to be

empowered to continue their involvement in their children's learning through partnerships with schools, the schools should be wary of taking over family responsibilities. Ideally, it is the family who is the major provider of support, warmth, comfort and protection. If, however, the family "fails" in the eyes of the school, the school may well attribute any disturbances perceived in the child to such "family failure".

In an attempt to alleviate perceived family shortcomings, the possibility exists of schools assuming more and more of the responsibilities of families as the traditional state of the family changes. In assuming the responsibility, schools might actually aid the destruction of family life and responsibility. Perhaps schools need to concentrate more on **helping** parents develop the skills they need to ensure that their children are "readier" to learn. It may be that the paradigm shift is one from parent education to parent support, so that parents, not schools continue to be the principal providers of the basics: love, nutrition, health care, freedom from abuse, and stimulation in language and experiences on which to base later learning.

Parents **are** the child's first teachers. This does not mean they are necessarily the **best** teachers, although there will certainly be instances where they are. In other instances, as Hudson and Ineichen (1991) suggest, parent skills, not only as teachers, but as nurturers, may suffer. Particularly, they note the difficulties often experienced by single, adolescent mothers:

'In theory, at least, teenagers have the advantage when it comes to parenting in that their own childhood has happened relatively recently, and their experiences as recipients of parenting skills may be fresh in their minds. In practice, however, it is questionable as to whether they possess sufficient maturity to turn their relatively recent memories into good account when the task of parenting faces them.' (Hudson and Ineichen, op cit. p 85)

Certainly other factors feature in the difficulties that these young mothers may face and this issue is more fully discussed in Section IV, Chapter 13, with regards to effective intervention programmes.

It may well be more valid to suggest that parents are the **best** teachers for a particular time (notably the early years) in a child's life and that a different, significant other or others may be the best for another time. Katz (1984, p 4) has said that

"... there is increasing pressure on teachers in day care centres, preschools and primary classes to respond to the apparent needs of children assumed to be unmet by their busy, working, and in many cases, single parents.. At the same time, there is growing enthusiasm for parent training and parent involvement in schools."

But the teaching roles of parents and teachers differ, and to propose that parents, although there is general agreement that they are the first teachers, are the child's **best** teachers could suggest that "teachers are, if not worst, second best."(Katz, 1984).

Whilst not meant to denigrate in any way the importance of parents in their children's lives, too much pressure on parents to take on the simultaneous teaching roles of the home and the school and to provide intensive, exacting instruction of academic knowledge and skills can certainly cause unwarranted confusion and stress in the home. Whether the pressures on parents to be academic teachers are imposed

by the school or by the parents themselves, certain difficulties may arise. If the child cannot realise the parent's expectations, parental frustration and disappointment may combine with the child's sense of failure and bewilderment at the changing role of the parent, the result can be a deterioration of parent/child relationships.

At the same time, teachers often complain that, before instruction can be effective, they need to nurture and give children the affection they assume could be lacking in the home. In fact, they cannot be expected to give to all their pupils the experiential, nurturing influence that the home provides. The dichotomy of the two different teaching roles, that is, the partiality of the parents who want the best for their children and the impartiality of the school as it strives to be fair to every child in its care, offers no mutual support.

To equate the teaching roles of parents and teachers is inappropriate. The differences in the functions and characteristics of each role are inherent, but the teaching efforts of the school and those of the home could well be supported by each other. One of the important factors in providing the most conducive learning environment for young children is to encourage an atmosphere of mutual support between the home and school. The potential of parent involvement hinges upon a partnership. Today's parents need to become empowered to participate in the formal continuing education of their children. Wasik et al. (1990, p 48) describe empowerment as the "***process by which those who belong to oppressed communities can be assisted by a developed effective support system***". It involves striving for maximum progress in children's learning by reducing environmental hazards, avoiding

maladaptions and enhancing coping skills and problem-solving abilities- thus home and school work toward a common purpose. Only with the recognition, by both parties, of the distinctions between teaching and experiences within the home and those within the schools, can an effective partnership be established.

Empowering parents to participate in the continuing education of their children may necessitate that schools, perhaps with the assistance of such community resources as medical personnel, social agencies and health units begin to offer programmes that will provide education and encouragement to parents, allowing them to feel more comfortable in a partnership with the schools. There are many levels of parent involvement in terms of actual participation in the education process, ranging from passive (e.g. walking the children to school) to active (e.g. participating in decision-making), but the effectiveness of home/school relationships depends upon the **quality** of the partnership Ball (1994, p 44) suggests that a quality partnership between parents and education depends upon ***'a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate'***. Ball goes on to stress the importance of continued two-way communication channels and the belief, by schools, that parents are as competent as the professionals where decision-making involving the education of their children is concerned. Parents **can** become empowered to participate in partnerships with schools with the ultimate aim being to optimise the educational progress of their children, but this will require a the commitment of both home and school.

I consider language learning one of the major developmental areas in early childhood on which parents have a crucial effect. The OECD (1994) has identified a poor grasp of the language of instruction (in most cases, the mother tongue) as one of six factors that can predict children who may be 'at risk'. Wells (1991, p 36) states that '***the most important factor urging children into speech is their desire to communicate their intentions more precisely.***' Once a child has a basic vocabulary and an understanding of the linguistic system, experience in using language becomes extremely important. Since it is in the very early years when language acquisition is most effective, parent involvement in the child's language learning becomes critical. There is little doubt that a full response from parents to a child's initiation of language interaction provides much more effective support for language learning.

Language Learning

"...The brain is poised at birth to learn speech." (Brierley, 1987, p 53)

Although changes have occurred over the years in the understanding of language and how it develops in young children, language experience in infancy is critical from any perspective and no one has disputed the important contributions parents make to this development. Learning one's first language entails much more than simply learning grammar and vocabulary. Chomsky's extensive study into language acquisition has concentrated on the construction of the explicit grammar of language. Although he considers every child to have an innate faculty for language that is genetically predetermined, he suggests that **experience** must be converted into knowledge of a particular language (Chomsky, 1986). It is the interaction of experience with the genetic predisposition to language acquisition that creates meaning. Wells echoes this idea and states that research over the last few decades has indicated that "***Human infants are born with a drive to make sense of their experience and with certain effective strategies for doing so***" (Wells, 1991, p 33). Central to the optimal development of language is the construction of meaning that results from the collaboration between communication and experience "***in which the words and sentences both refer to the shared situation and reflect a particular orientation to it***"" (Wells, 1985, p 102).

Once the linguistic system is in place and a child has acquired a basic vocabulary of several thousand words, experience becomes the springboard of meaning. Children need continual opportunities to interact with words, phrases and sentences and to practice them in

meaningful contexts. It is the adults who need to make "***the effort to understand the child's intended meaning and extend it in terms the child can understand***" (Wells, 1991, p 17).

Research has shown that language development is crucial to the educational process (CACE, 1967; Brierley, 1987; Nutbrown, 1994). Such development is very dependent upon the early stimulation a child experiences in the home. "***The impact of the experiences children bring with them to school is determined by the words they know. If they are lacking, the value of experiences is blunted unless the words are supplied***" (Brierley, op cit., p 54). Inherent in Brierley's statement is the suggestion that, whilst children need a large vocabulary of words, it is the meaning that is central in language development.

Most children move from the familiar, supportive environment of the home to the 'unknown' environment of the school. Although Bruner (op cit. p 472) has said that ***"The importance of early experience is only dimly sensed..."***, researchers and educators are, twenty years later, placing much more emphasis on the differences in language experience that children bring to school. The hidden curriculum of the home, that is, the incidental learning from unintended or unplanned events, often accounts for the diversity in children at school in terms of linguistic awareness. Wells (1985, p 100) suggests that ***" some children benefit from their schooling much more than others and it has frequently been argued that a major cause of differential success is the difference between children as a result of their pre-school linguistic experience at home in the ability to meet the linguistic expectations of the classroom."*** The larger the difference between expectations at

home and those at school, the greater the likelihood that a child may experience frustration and a drop in motivation, which in turn may create problems in learning.

As meaning develops in the course of a child's experiences, in response to vocalisations, intonations and reactions to actions, it is the parents role to talk to their children and help them not only to find words to express needs, feelings and experiences so that they can communicate with others, but to respond in turn to what others are communicating to them. The development of meaning in language has long been recognised and Bushnell emphasised its importance in the mid-1800s:

> ***"... language itself has no meaning till rudimental impressions are first begotten in the life of experience to give it meaning...a child would never know the meaning of any word in a language just by hearing the sound of it in his ears. He must learn to put meaning into it, having found that meaning in his impressions and then the word becomes significant"*** (in Greven. op cit., p 166).

Lewis (1965, p 78- supported by NAEYC, 1989) indicates that since meaning develops during the child's engagement with the environment and depends upon the response of significant others to actions and verbal discourse, "***there must be plentiful and frequent opportunities for communication***". It is during the early years of life and within the familiar circle of the family that a child finds such opportunities for communication.

Since communication skills are initially developed and enriched within the context of the family, the quality of verbal interactions has a powerful impact on the child's understanding of the world.

"Language helps (children) to a deeper insight into what is going on around them and promotes an ability of supreme importance- the power of referring to the past and the future" (Lewis, op cit., p 79). Everything that a child does leads him to use and respond to language. As a child becomes more aware of the physical and social environments, curiosity is often stimulated by questioning, leading to problems which need solving. In order to solve the problem, the child's challenge will be to recognise any gaps between current knowledge and understanding and bring into play the complex, non-linguistic thinking and perceptions that have resulted from opportunities to use language to explore, construct and communicate ideas within the family setting.

Unless the child's environment offers opportunities for dialogue, paraphrasing and extending meaning, speech, as a vehicle of thought will not be utilised to its optimum potential. When a language deficit is apparent, programmes that may enhance the deficit have proved successful, even up to the beginning of adolescence (Bruner, op cit.). Many educators adhere to the idea that "readiness" awaits in every child, and to a great extent it does, but Bruner makes the point that opportunities must be provided to nurture that readiness, not simply to wait for it to develop of its own accord. In a sense, "readiness" is like the seed of a flower. Without proper nurturing, its development will be minimal and may end at any time. But food, water and sunshine, in other words, nurturing, will ensure that the seed develops to its maximum potential.

Bruner (op cit. p 471) goes on to say that it is "***in the subtle interaction of parent and child that the readiness skills for language learning are instilled***". The optimal development of these skills is highly dependent upon the types of environment and interaction that feed and nurture the seeds of language. He likens the growth of language to a staircase where the sharp jump of the risers would indicate an optimal growth period, the steps, a time for reflective internalisation of what has occurred during the period of growth. Without the stimulation in the early years of opportunities for discussion, modeling, paraphrasing and relevant feedback, there may be little learning in the reflection process.

Few would dispute the fact that the values of the home environment have a powerful effect on all aspects of literacy development; neither would the great variation in home environments be argued. But, it is precisely the variation in background knowledge that occurs in any group of children that affects the further construction of language learning in school and, the fact remains that, often, ***"children from disadvantaged homes enter school with fewer exposures to the tools of literacy and are more 'at risk' relative to their literacy acquisition.***" (Roser et al. 1990, p 554) Furthermore, it is the ***"absence of experiences which are more common for middle class children***" (Maria, 1989, p 296) that affect the process of exploring, constructing and communicating meaning in language learning. All children whether 'at risk' or not, deserve to be in supportive environments at home and at school- environments that facilitate learning and provide opportunities for maximum development. It is 'only literacy by its presence or absence' (Postman,op cit. p 122) that has the power to

affect language learning in early childhood and to make it more or less important in the broader picture of later learning.

Chapter 6 of this section will explore some of the different ways that Europe and North America involve parents in the education of their children.

Chapter 6: Partnerships with Schools

***'It takes a whole village to educate a child'* (African Adage)**

Throughout the decades since the turn of the century, educators, in recognition of the importance of parents as teachers, have striven to involve them in education in various ways and to various degrees. The previous chapter has discussed the importance of parents' influence as the first teachers in the lives of their children. Contemporary writers, in agreement with their historical counterparts, continue to emphasise the key influence of parents on their children's development. Gottfried and Gottfried (1988), in their investigations into the effects of maternal employment and family environment on children's development acknowledge previous research that indicated a positive relationship between the interpersonal relationships within the family and cognitive, academic and social development from infancy through the school years.

As shown in Section I, Pestalozzi and Froebel sought to enhance the early experience of the home in their own schools. In the early 1800s, Pestalozzi advocated that a child's education began at the moment of birth and that the first years of life, being spent at home, were just as essential to the education process as the later years to be spent at school (Heafford, 1967). Froebel also believed that families were important as the first educators in a child's life. Mothers, particularly, had a great influence on their children's education and, indeed, he felt, the child's first impressions in family life would be the most lasting ones. So strongly did he believe this that he arranged for the mothers of his students to attend meetings, lectures and discussions to help them better understand child development. He encouraged mothers to

observe and participate in the games and activities in his kindergarten so that they could watch the teachers and use their methods at home. Not only did Froebel advocate mothers' participation in school activities as he strived to attain his goal of education the whole child, he published, in an attempt at parent education, a book of "*Mother Plays*", prescribing activities for mothers to use in stimulating their children's intellectual and physical growth. For Froebel ***"Education was a joint venture between parents and teachers***"(Liebschner, 1991 p 11) and the school a community where the home and school could come together to meet the needs of the children (Bruce, 1987).

When she established her "Children's Houses" in Italian tenements at the end of the 19th century, Maria Montessori realised the benefits of a home and school partnership describing it as "the union of the family and the school in the matter of educational aims" (Montessori, 1912, p 63). In order to facilitate such a union, she located the 'Children's Houses' within the tenements, insisting the Directresses live "under the eyes of the parents". Mothers were encouraged to observe their children's activities in the schools at any time of the day. In establishing the 'Rules and Regulations of the 'Children's Houses', Montessori stressed the involvement of the parents in their children's education:

> The parents who wish to avail themselves of the advantages of the 'Children's House' pay nothing. They must, however, assume these binding obligations:
>
> • To send their children to the 'Children's House' at the appointed time, clean in body and clothing, and provided with a suitable apron.

• '...Once a week, at least, the mothers may talk with the Directress, giving her information concerning the home life of the child, and receiving helpful advice from her.' (Montessori, op cit., pp 70-71).

Whilst Montessori did involve parents and was adamant that they remain a part of their children's education, it was on her terms only. The input from the parents was merely to provide feedback to enable the teachers to address the needs of the children and, in return, the parents received instructions from the teachers regarding discipline, nutrition and cleanliness.

The notion of the importance of linking home and school in order to make schooling more effective has continued, from its historical beginnings, to be recognised and valued in the twentieth century. In the 1930s, Susan Isaacs, convinced of the critical influence they had on their children's development, was concerned about educating parents to assist them in providing the best possible environment for their children. She was extremely sympathetic to those parents who needed advice in the day-to-day matters of raising children and wanted to ensure accessibility of information and child-rearing ideas that were readable and pertinent for parents. To this end, she wrote a series of pamphlets- *Concerning Children*- that were meant to bring parents to a better understanding of child development (Gardner, 1969). Although she never minimised the problems or conflicts that could arise, Isaacs' attempt at parent education was to develop confidence and reduce anxiety in parents- to instil in them a belief in their own prowess as parents.

In England, in 1967, the Plowden Report emphasised that partnership between the home and the school was an essential and prime link in the education of children. In addition, the Report recommended that increased levels of communication be established between home and school in order to foster that link. Again, in 1972, Davie et al. (p 27) emphasised the importance of the family circle, including parents and child, in early education: "In early life a great deal of children's development is determined by their learning at home...Each child brings these ideas and expectations to the school situation." Therefore, they say, school should be a "natural extension" of the child's world through reinforcement of the ideas and confirmation of the expectations brought from the home.

MacPherson(1993) suggests that by the end of the 1970's, there was increased emphasis in policy on parental involvement in education, due in part to the 1978 Warnock report which stressed the important contributions that parents make to the education of their children. Chazan and Laing (1982) quoted the Warnock report ***"...parents are full partners in the educational process and should receive encouragement, advice and support to enable them to help their children effectively."*** They go on to stress that the family is the major influence on social development, providing the experience and the environment needed for cognitive and affective development. MacPherson(1993) also recognised the impact of the 1989 Children Act in England on the importance of partnerships between parents and Local Education Authorities and suggested that the creation of these partnerships is a continuing issue. The Children Act acknowledges

that the prime responsibility for raising children lies with the parents but it also emphasises that the State must be prepared to assist those parents who, for whatever reasons, are unable to carry out that responsibility.

Lochrie et al. (1993, p 1) also stress the importance of parents in their children's learning. They stress that

"***it is from parents that children learn most, particularly in the first months and years of their lives....Children are learning from the moment they are born, and their parents and wider family provide the context in which this learning takes place, and the continuity between home, pre-school and school.***".

The key issue has become the ***"basis upon which relationships between educators and parents are founded. Partnership requires a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and the willingness to negotiate.***"(op cit. p 1). It is of paramount importance that communication channels between home and school remain open in order for joint problem-solving to take place and to provide a supportive environment within which the children can learn.

The emphasis on the importance of parents in the education of their children is by no means unique to England. Some continental European countries are establishing strong parent links as the vital partnership between home and school is recognised and valued. Although in England many parents are involved in the decision-making process as governors on school boards, some countries appear slow to accept such involvement and tend to involve parents only on the basis of making classroom materials and reporting on their children. For

further reference, David et al.(1993) provide an overview of various forms and degrees of parental involvement in European countries.

The principles upon which Alberta Education's Early Childhood Services (kindergarten) programme was based, acknowledged that "Parents are Primary Agents in the Child's Development" (Schmidt, 1984). In the description of the subsequent Program Dimensions of Self-Concept Development, Health and Physical Development, Social Development, Emotional Development, Intellectual Development and Creative Development, Alberta Education stresses that, whilst the family has the most significant role, it is a shared responsibility of "parents, staff and community services" to meet the goals highlighted under each of these headings. In addition, Alberta Education places a great deal of importance on the involvement of parents in the Early Childhood Services (ECS) programme. Since parents have had a special relationship with their children from the moment of birth, it is paramount that these relationships continue, even as the child moves from the home environment to that of the school. The ECS programmes are urged to support parent involvement through the provision of opportunities to:

- ***enhance their knowledge and acquire the skills and attitudes necessary to meet the developmental and special needs of their children***

- ***be involved in advisory and decision making activities related to policy development, administration, program planning, implementation and evaluation***

- ***be involved as a teacher of their own child in the home***

- ***be involved as a special resource***

- ***be involved as an aide in a centre or home program***

"be involved in advocacy roles on behalf of children
(Alberta Education, 1984)

Whilst acknowledging that parents are the primary teachers in their children's lives, Alberta Education recognises that, as family structure and function have altered in the wake of changes in society, technology, and the economy and of increased geographic mobility, parents may need assistance in understanding principles of child development that could influence their provision of appropriate familial and environmental educational opportunities. ECS programs are urged to develop a system of co-operation between home, school and community to deliver responsive services to meet the needs of all the children in the programs. In Alberta, the Lethbridge Montessori School, continuing the philosophy of Montessori herself, stresses that "the success of the Montessori program depends greatly on the involvement of the parents, their interest in the child's activities and their support for the program" (Lethbridge Montessori School orientation materials, 1994). Not only do the kindergarten programmes in Alberta, public and private, consider parent involvement an essential component of quality, Alberta Education's (1990a, p 3) Philosophy of Elementary Schooling clearly states the importance of establishing parent partnerships in its goals and objectives for education:

The partnerships established among home, community and school are probably the most significant features of a student's learning environment in the early childhood and elementary school years.

New Brunswick (1992) also provides an information booklet for parents. The booklet explains the links between the programme activities, children's development and the teacher's role. Parents are encouraged to visit and participate in the kindergarten programme on a regular basis or as an occasional volunteer. But, as stated earlier in this thesis, in Section III, neither the teacher resource book nor the parent book make mention of parent partnerships in terms of participation in parent advisory councils, parent support programmes and the assessment process as routes to more meaningful continuation of their involvement in the learning process. Perhaps this inadequacy will be addressed in the future since the kindergarten programme is still essentially in its infancy.

Athey (1990) suggests that early intervention in education that involves not only school staff, but parents and other professionals within the community, can enhance children's intellectual development. Increased knowledge, in turn, builds higher self-esteem and increased emotional stability, resulting in further learning. It is the partnerships of parents and professionals that enhance learning. ***"Parents and professionals can help children separately or they can work together to the greater benefit of children"*** (Athey, op cit., p 66). Since it is the development of an **effective** relationship between parents and professionals, commitment and effort are needed from the educators. It is their responsibility to ensure that parents have access to relevant information and opportunities to discuss their children's needs.

Empowering parents to become a continuing, active participant in their children's education may instil in some teachers a fear of the power that

they may perceive parents to wield. It is important to dissuade teachers of that fear and to persuade them of the value of working co-operatively for the benefit of their pupils. In order for parent involvement to be effective, it is essential to develop a ***"...clear and articulate philosophy of education with respect to the desired relations between the home and the school, for without this, the head has no criteria by which to decide between opposing possibilities.***"(Day et al., 1990, p 197). Although the degree of parent involvement will vary and should be flexible from school to school, it must be kept in mind that **effective** parent involvement requires not only cooperation but an active participation on both sides in order to enhance the learning potential of the children.

The spectrum of parental involvement in North America and Europe ranges from the minor involvement of classroom assistance as previously mentioned to full partnership in the decision-making process. Whilst teachers and schools generally welcome the addition of extra adults to help in a busy classroom, Day et al.(op cit. p 206) caution against using parents as classroom assistants only: "***Parents helping in the school are not the key method of building good home-school relationships, not only because the proportion of parents likely to be involved in this way is small but also because of the pressures placed on the heads and teachers.***" The added burden of providing instruction and direction to parent helpers and of allowing one's teaching to be publicly viewed and evaluated, generally without confidentiality, may, in fact, be more stressful than coping with the class alone. Day goes on to stress that in order to build a strong

partnership, parents should be involved as integral partners in the decision-making process in schools.

Involving parents as "working partners" results in benefits to all stakeholders (Day et al., op cit.). Not only is the academic performance of their children enhanced, but parents gain first-hand knowledge of the functioning of the school, thus providing a firmer foundation and understanding for discussing the progress of their children. In addition, parents can offer a wide range of skills and interests that may benefit the educational programme and administration. In a partnership that involves trust and ease of communication, teachers stand to gain important information from parents that may assist in developing programming for future learning. Parents who are better informed and aware of the activities of the school will be stronger supporters and thus become important public relations speakers for the school. Strahan (1994) cites examples of actual interactions between parents and school personnel that illustrate the benefits of establishing mutual respect and understanding. Whilst she recognises the importance of parents as public relations officers for the school, Strahan stresses that communication and participation are integral elements in a meaningful partnership. Involving parents in the education process requires careful consideration of the needs of children, teachers and parents, and frequent discussion of the extent of the partnership and the direction that it is taking in order to ensure the optimum development of opportunities to extend children's learning.

School boards in Alberta are made up of elected citizens from the community, although often these officials may not currently be parents

of school-age children. In fact, elected membership on a school board is sometimes the first step in the advancement of a political career. The Alberta government's *Vision for the Nineties* (Alberta Education, 1991, p 26) recognised the need for parents to participate responsibly in their children's education: "***School jurisdictions should ensure that every school has an active and purposeful school council.***" Most schools in Alberta have parent representatives on a school council and their input, whilst it is advisory in nature, is generally valued and considered. In addition to commenting, at times, on curriculum matters, the parent councils often raise funds to cover extra activities that the school budget cannot sustain and organise school wide events and celebrations. The involvement of parents on the school councils does not preclude their valued input in the classroom as assistants who are actively involved in their children's learning, since most Alberta schools have an open-door policy as far as direct classroom involvement is concerned.

At times, ***"...parents tend to undervalue their own influence and potential as vital factors in their children's learning, except over matters where they see themselves as competent***" (Blatchford et al in Clark, 1988, p 74). Parents must be empowered by the schools to participate in the education of their children. They need, in many cases, to regain a feeling of worthiness, respect and partnership with schools in order to ensure the best possible education for their children. Neufeld (1990) supports the positive influence that parent involvement can have on pupil achievement. She cites Chubb (1988) on the importance of the interweaving of effective school organisation and

parent involvement:

> "***The largest estimated influence of the effectiveness of school organisation is the role of parents in the school. All other things being equal, schools in which parents are highly involved, cooperative, and well-informed are more likely to develop effective organisations than are schools in which parents do not possess these qualities.***"(Neufeld, op cit. p 264)

The interweaving of school and parents must be dependent upon the individuality of school district approaches. Each district must be given the flexibility to develop partnership models which are best suited to their individual needs. ***"There is no set of clear and unequivocal 'answers' to major questions on how to work effectively with parents and governors because the solution to a problem has to be found in that situation and not imported from outside that school's environment"*** (Day et. al., op cit., p 198). As Jennings (1977, p vii) has said "***It is only fools who learn by experience. Wise men do not have to learn of the existence of every brick wall by banging their noses into it."*** and guidelines that have proved to be successful in many situations will provide a framework for schools as they establish a model of parent/school partnership based on their individual needs.

Traditionally, mothers have tended to be the active participants in their children's schooling, both in terms of interaction in the home and visiting and assisting in various invited roles in the schools. With the changes in roles both within the family and in the work world, it is evident that the contributions that fathers can make should be recognised. To this end, it is with both parents, if, in fact, this applies in any given situation, that an effective home/school partnership should be established. Empowering parents to be active participants in a

home/school partnership can lead to a greater willingness, on their part, to be open to new information about the educational process.

Wolfendale (1992) has identified seven of the most common examples of parent involvement in schools in the 1970s and 1980s. Certainly the most traditional of these is **parents coming to assist either in the classroom or elsewhere in the school**. Generally, in this capacity, parents read with children, help out in other curriculum areas or assist the teachers with materials preparation. **Parents are also involved as teachers in the home**, continuing a role that began with the birth of their child. This role at home typically involves home reading programmes and assisting with homework and projects. **Communication links between home and school** keep both teachers and parents informed. These usually involve school newsletters, written communications from either parents or teachers, home visits, parent/school councils and parent/teachers interviews. **Parents are often involved in assessment,** particularly when a child has special educational needs and regular home/school consultations monitor progress and plan for future programmes. **Parents are involved in community education**, as **school governors** and, very often, through **participation in local and national interest groups.**

In addition to these familiar forms of involvement, parents are often involved as advocates for their children's educational rights, particularly very young children and children with special needs. This advocacy links to parents' involvement with assessment and programme planning for their children, but goes a step further. Such advocacy sometimes stems from a deep sense of concern or grievance

over a special issue. Parents may lobby politicians, local authorities and schools, not only to include their special needs in the schools, wherever possible, but to ensure appropriate programming and provision of resources. Effective lobbying by parents, on behalf of their children, has often been the catalyst that fuels legislative change.

Startright (Ball, 1994, p 42) quotes the African adage ***"It takes a whole village to educate a child."*** Increasingly, the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children is becoming a shared and over-lapping responsibility of the home, the school and the community. Without denying the importance of parents in the educational process, it is becoming clear that the community, not only in the role of support from social agencies and health services, but in the additional role of support from businesses, can supplement education. Schools would be wise to include representation from the business community, as well as parents, in their decision-making processes. More and more, businesses are willing to support learning in such areas as the development of communication skills, technological expertise, cooperative attitudes and interpersonal relationships. The benefits to business are obvious. Business leaders are often willing to give advice on skills they agree are important to survive in the work world. In addition, funds and technical equipment are often donated to schools particularly when business leaders believe themselves to be stakeholders in the educational process. But business and education partnerships should be explored with caution. This idea is more fully discussed in Chapter 5 of Section IV.

Research focussed on established models of parent/school partnerships and discussed in this chapter has identified some of the elements of such partnerships that appear to be more effective in enhancing social, emotional and cognitive development in children. In order to maximise the effectiveness of parent/school partnerships, programmes which share this aim should be aware of the need to ***"encourage and support parents' confidence in their own impulses and their own competence***" (Katz, 1984, p 20).

Section IV will take the notion of partnerships further and examine some established models of parent/school/community partnerships within the context of effective schools- schools whose intention is to provide high quality programmes which include support and learning opportunities for young children, particularly in the early years and including 'at risk' children and their families, in an attempt to reduce school failure in the later years.

Section III provides the description and analysis of the fieldwork undertaken in the research for this thesis. It examines the perceptions of teachers in relation to their attitudes and beliefs about the nature of high quality early childhood education and care. It also examines the perceptions of teachers with regard to the importance of the early childhood years as a foundation for children's later learning. Finally, this section attempts to identify, from the teachers' responses, elements of early childhood programmes that appear, in their perceptions, to

make a significant contribution to high quality early years provision. These will be further discussed in Section IV.

Section III: Perceptions of Early Childhood Teachers

'Teachers were, it seemed to us, an important point of reference. After all, they are with youngsters every day, watching their reactions, observing their relationships with others, noting their struggles and successes. Teachers, especially the sensitive and seasoned ones, have a keen, almost intuitive, understanding of children's needs.' (Boyer, 1992, p 6)

Today's children are the future citizens and leaders of tomorrow's world. Although educators and researchers in education have long acknowledged the importance of the early years of childhood in providing a firm basis for future learning, these are the very years that, particularly in Britain and in some provinces in Canada, appear to hold the least value in terms of providing government funding. The importance of children' learning experiences in the early years cannot be denied and, indeed, continues to be emphasised, particularly since the research of Hunt and Bloom in the 1960s. Study after study (Woodhead, 1985; Brierley, 1987; Athey, 1990; Boyer, 1992; Ball, 1994; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1994) points to this crucial time in a child's life and to the need for developmentally appropriate educational practice, much earlier than in past years, to complement the vital input of the family. Such practice and emphasis on a continuing partnership between schools and parents must surely be supported, not only philosophically, but financially, by governments. Recent examples from Canada and from Britain would seem to indicate a distinct lack of financial commitment.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, in September, 1994, the Alberta government reduced programme funding by 50 per cent for children under six. Although the funding was restored in 1997, under pressure

from the public, the government continues to believe that, during each school year, " ... a quality 240- hour basic program, in conjunction with family and community learning experiences, would ... prepare a child for successful entry into Grade I." (Alberta Education, 1996). In terms of the average 190 days per school year in Alberta, this means that the government considers slightly more than one hour a day sufficient time for a kindergarten programme for five year old children. The 1997 increase restored funding for 400 hours- just over two hours a day- still significantly less than provision for five year olds in Britain and New Brunswick. In British Columbia, the Year 2000 programme, highly celebrated by educationists throughout the world (Fullan, 1991; Noll, 1992; Bredecamp,1993 and Cambourne, 1993- the latter two in a press release from the B.C. government), faces the risk of philosophical and financial cutbacks; New Brunswick, on the other hand, a financially poor province, recognises the value of early education and has recently implemented and funded universal access to kindergarten. England's continuing push for universal nursery education, despite years of lobbying, has yet to come to full fruition.

Policy makers have to take note of the research evidence (Slavin et al., 1993; Sylva, 1994a; Schweinhardt and Weikart, 1994; Fuerst and Petty, 1996) that indicates the need to support, both financially and philosophically, quality early childhood provision. Eisner (1992, pp. 14-15) reminds us that we do not live in a world that is constantly in a pristine state of inertia, but in one that continually changes with interactions and transactions:

The world has changed since Copernicus told us how it worked. The world has changed since Tycho Brae provided a picture of

the heavens. The world has changed since Newton, Einstein, and Bohr gave us their versions of how it is. I suspect it will continue to change.

In modern developed societies, changes appear to be taking place in the basic social structures which, in the past, served as relatively stabilizing features of everyday life. Not only has increased mobility allowed for a more diverse mix of culture, language and tradition, but the stability of living in one home and neighbourhood, even in one city, is easily disrupted as families move house across counties, countries and continents. The availability of contraception and greater choice over its use has contributed to a decrease in family size. This reduction in birth rates has precipitated major changes in the lives of children, altering the amount of time which they would have spent interacting with siblings and peers. The relative ease of divorce (Murray, 1995) has affected the traditional notion of the two parent family, and the disruption of that notion as a stabilising factor in the lives of children has been well documented (Gammage, 1995b).

Society is changing rapidly and nowhere is the change so rapid as in the growth of the numbers of mothers joining the workforce (Katz, 1984; Postman, 1983; Gammage, 1995). This influx of women into the work-force has resulted from an increased emphasis on gender equality and opportunity and, often, from an economic need for both parents in a family to work, as well as from smaller families which allow more mothers to pursue full-time careers. This, in turn, affects the demand for daycare and reduces the time children would traditionally have spent "at their mother's knee". Related to this is a reduction in the amount of 'quality' time that parents spend with their

children as a result of the pressures that may be caused from the constraints and stresses experienced by two career-families.

Recent estimates (Martin, 1992) in the United States predicted that by 1995, 80 per cent of American mothers would have joined the workforce. The end result of this will be that two thirds of all children, in the United States under the age of six, will have working mothers. These fluctuating social conditions point to a need for the politicians and educators to refocus policies concerning the nature of formal education. Since the politicians control the purse strings, they need to be vigilant and flexible in order to ensure that appropriate funding and educational opportunities are available to ameliorate problems arising from changing social circumstances. Only in this way is it possible to conceive of a society in which all children have the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. Moreover, education and care, particularly in the early years, can no longer be seen as two, often separate and differently focussed, forms of provision. Each clearly contains elements of the other and their goals need to be re-examined and re-negotiated in order to meet, more effectively, the demands of modern society and the needs of today's children and their families.

Since many of us live in societies that appear to need constant convincing of the importance of providing quality care and education in the early years (particularly the politicians who oversee the disbursement of government funds), research evidence that supports this contention may, in fact, have a crucial role in policy development and change. It may, for instance, convince politicians of the importance of providing quality early years programmes that are

financially supported by those government departments concerned with education. It may highlight the need to develop 'quality' standards for early childhood provision that are based upon the perceptions of educators and the knowledge generated by researchers. It is my belief that a comparative study of the philosophy and provision of early childhood education and care in Canada and Britain that includes the perceptions of teachers will support the existing and overwhelming evidence of the positive impact of early years education on later school achievement and social responsibility.

Chapter 7: Methodology

Research Paradigm

The research community has, in the past, been clearly divided regarding the use of quantitative or qualitative methods of inquiry. The division appears to have arisen, 'not merely as a disagreement over the relative advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative methods, but as a fundamental clash between methodological paradigms' (Reichardt and Cook, 1979, p 9). But, in spite of criticisms from those who may prefer the more traditional, and in their view, scientific 'purity' of quantitative methods, qualitative research methods have become increasingly popular, in recent years, in educational research (Burgess, 1985; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Eisner, 1991; Schratz, 1993; Schratz and Walker, 1995; Potter, 1996).

It is clear that the route to qualitative research is not so easily designed as that of quantitative research. Generating statistical evidence is relatively simple when compared to the rigours of collecting qualitative information from those who are closest to and involved in the culture of the community which is under examination.

Potter (1996) provides an array of definitions of the qualitative approach to research. These range from direct to indirect definitions, but, Potter suggests, all definitions are based on the values inherent in individual interpretations of the approach. Although the definitions differ amongst those who design them, it is the '***shared beliefs about how research should be conducted and the contributions the***

research can make' (Potter, 1996, p 26) that underpin the qualitative approach.

The diversity of definitions may cease to be problematic since many researchers who espouse the use of qualitative methods share 'a tacit, but mutual understanding of the invoked terms' (Evans, 1990, p 155). Potter (1996) proposes the use of the term 'qualitative approach' as opposed to paradigm, technique, method or methodology. This type of research is, he argues,

'a perspective on research that is conducted by scholars who want to examine some phenomenon, develop insights and report those insights to others. Scholars must have some sort of approach to this task. An approach is composed of a set of assumptions, goals and methods. Qualitative is one kind of approach.' (p 13).

This argument does not, however, preclude a multidisciplinary approach to research that would incorporate aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research.

Rather than condensing, enhancing or amalgamating the many interpretations of qualitative research into a single definition, a brief discussion of three issues raised by Potter (op cit.) can offer further insight into the subtleties of qualitative research.

First, there is the issue of ontology- one's perception of the nature of the world and the actions within it. Potter (op cit.) proposes a continuum of ontological positions. A continuum in its own right usually connotes a multitude of positions that may fall between several identified positions. On Potter's continuum, my own beliefs surrounding the ontological issues of qualitative research rest

somewhat to the left between idealism and materialism- contrary to a totally idealistic view of the left versus the realistic view of the right. Of course 'things' exist, but one's own perceptions of that existence depend upon one's experience in the situations that are perceived and under investigation. Therefore, with regard to the ontological issue relating to qualitative research. I have taken Potter's position of **idiographic idealism**, that is, that

'There is an external reality that is very complex and dynamic; it varies substantially across individuals and across time. There is a material and nonmaterial reality. The nonmaterial reality is very complex and dynamic, because it varies substantially across individuals and across time. The perception of meaning is very sensitive to context and changes substantially across contexts.' (Potter, op cit. p 48).

It is within the context of the historical roots of early childhood education, current practice and contemporary research that I have attempted not only to look for similarities amongst teachers in two different countries, but to present their perceptions regarding both the importance of early childhood provision and the elements that contribute to 'quality' early childhood provision. As I have stated earlier, these perceptions have been gathered at a time when many societal changes have affected the educational needs of children in the early years.

Second, Potter proposes, the issue of epistemology is also essential to consider in qualitative research. How is it that people are limited, or not, from making meaning from a given situation? Whilst material

reality does, indeed, exist in the world, the meaning that is made of that reality is complex, dynamic and changeable and depends upon the perceptions that individuals make based upon their own experience and upon the times when individuals perceive meaning (Eisner, 1991; Potter, 1996). ***'The reality of the perceptions is therefore contingent upon the context they use to interpret the phenomenon'*** (Potter, op cit. p 40).

On Potter's epistemology continuum, it is **intersubjectivity**, that is, that ***' that researchers can never be purely objective' but they can demonstrate that people share interpretations'*** (Potter, op cit. p 48). That is what I have attempted to do, in this thesis, with the perceptions of early years teachers from two different countries, two different (though, as I have said, somewhat similar) cultures, and teaching different groups of children from these two countries and cultures.

Finally, Potter raises the issue of axiomatic perspectives and the ***'assumptions that scholars make about the qualitative approach'*** (p 42). He presents the five assumptions of phenomenology, interpretive, hermeneutics, naturalism and humanistic studies. Interpretive study suggests that researchers, whilst presenting the perceptions of those involved in the study, often bring their own experiences to the interpretation of the data (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Eisner, 1991; Potter, 1996). As I have stated earlier, my own experiences in the field of

early childhood education have certainly contributed to the questions posed regarding quality early years provision. Nevertheless, I have attempted to present the teachers' perceptions, as they were provided, within the confines of the teachers' own social constructs and value systems. Still, I must admit that my own social constructs and value system will, in all likelihood, have had some effect upon the interpretation of these perceptions.

Hermeneutic study suggests that the world is in constant interaction with the parts and the wholes of a given situation. A part can only be understood within the context of the whole; conversely, the whole is constructed of parts. The process of these interactions is constantly changing as the world changes. Questions have been asked of teachers about the 'whole' of early childhood education-about its importance, about its quality. The answers- the parts- have been contextualised within history, practice and research, always with the acknowledgement that societal change is ever present and continual. Therefore, as Potter suggests (p 44) ***'no criticism is ever final or complete'***. But it is this particular period of time- approaching the year 2000, with its particular societal changes that has indicated to me the need to examine the importance and the nature of early childhood provision.

It is a combination of these two axiomatic perspectives which are the key assumptions underlying the qualitative aspects of this study: the **interpretive** approach, that is that ***'researchers should strive to se the situation from the perspective of the other'*** and the **hermeneutic** approach, that is that '***research is a never ending process of observing an instance and interpreting it in terms of a context that is itself a construction of instances'*** Potter, op cit. p 48).

As I have stated, there are many interpretations of what 'qualitative' means in educational research circles. Any endeavour to insist upon one set approach to qualitative investigation would likely prove unsuccessful ***'given the array of different cultural and educational environments where qualitative research methodology is applied'*** (Schratz, 1993, p 181). But, as with the definitions, several attributes of qualitative research have been identified by those who have used it as a method of investigation (Reichardt and Cook, 1979; Burgess, 1985; Eisner, 1991; Potter, 1996). However, not all the attributes identified by various researchers will pertain to all qualitative research projects. In the instance of this thesis, several of the attributes proposed by Burgess (1985, pp 4-5) are readily identifiable and worthy of mention:

- **Contextualisation of the focus of the research.** Whilst the focus of the thesis is on the quality of the current nature of early childhood provision, it has been contextualised within an historical, a social and a cultural framework. These aspects are discussed in Sections I and II.

- **Establishment of a theoretical framework.** Whilst only three questions were presented at the onset of the thesis, several additional issues emerged as the research advanced. These are discussed Chapter 8.

- **Involvement of those closest to the focus of the research.** As a researcher, I was attempting to obtain the perceptions of teachers who were closely involved in the provision of programmes for children in the early years and interviews were used to complement and extend the comments and perceptions provided by the questionnaire responses.

- **Consideration of the audience.** In considering the audience who may wish to access the information generated by this study, it is hoped that one of the outcomes of the thesis will be to provide teachers' perceptions of quality early childhood education to those involved in the provision of such programmes. The wider audience could include pre-service teachers in training, university lecturers, teachers accessing inservice and continuing professional development opportunities, school or authority based administrators, providers of services for children and their families (e.g. health authorities, social services) and parents. A further audience may be those involved in the development of early childhood policy at the government level. It would, in my opinion, be a bonus, if policy makers were to find the outcomes of the

research useful in making decisions regarding programme provision for young children.

- **Consideration of ethical issues.** Ethical issues were considered with respect to the development and conducting of the research, the participation of the respondents and the dissemination of the outcomes of the research. These issues are discussed, in more detail, in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Qualitative research design often adopts certain elements of several paradigms. It is

> ***'... an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It cross-cuts the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach.'*** (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994, p 576)

In the postmodernist context of the 1990s, disciplinary boundaries in research are often crossed. Richardson (1994, p 517) argues that the core of postmodernism is the ***'doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" of the privileged form of authoritarian knowledge.'*** Instead of rejecting traditional methods, it often combines these with new methods. Eisner (1991, p 41) also argues for the use of multiple methods and the crossing of disciplinary boundaries in

research:

'Not only can studies be qualitative by degrees- that is, some qualitative studies may be extremely figurative and literary while others more literal in the use of language- they can employ, both literary and quantitative forms of representation. There is no reason why several forms of representation , including the quantitative cannot be combined in the conduct of a study that is dominantly qualitative in character, or vice versa.'

Many of the attributes of qualitative research can apply to the collection of quantitative data, as well. For example, quantitative research would require a theoretical framework, just as qualitative does; as quantitative data may complement qualitative information, the converse is true as well; the quantitative researcher generally considers the audience to which the research is aimed, as does the qualitative researcher; and attention to ethical issues is just as important in quantitative research as it is in qualitative research.

The quantitative research paradigm is, often, wholly reliant upon impersonal feedback in terms of surveys and questionnaires from large groups of respondents who remain anonymous and faceless. This frequently results in the generation of statistical data in the form of charts, graphs and tables. Qualitative research, on the other hand, has some distinct characteristics. which set it apart from quantitative research. Although there is an element of quantitative methodology in the thesis, much of the substance comes from the qualitative data.

Quantitative research is often designated as a positivist method which is fairly objective in nature. On the other hand, postpositivism usually advocates a much more subjective, hence, qualitative, approach, often

incorporating multiple methods as one way of capturing as much as possible of the reality of 'lived experience' in an attempt to verify an hypothesis.

'Positivist methods are but one way of telling a story about society. They may be no better or no worse than any other way; they just tell a different kind of story.' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994)

'The qualitative tradition grows out of the idealist argument that humans creatively and subjectively construct meaning for themselves' (Potter, op cit. p 49), yet it allows researchers the flexibility to use multidisciplinary methods in order to present their own, and others', observations and perceptions.

I have stated earlier that qualitative research is inevitably embedded in the nature of perceptions and in the social and cultural construction of knowledge. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly used in social and health sciences in the last two decades, employing research techniques originating from anthropology. In British educational circles (which were, for many years, largely wedded to quantitative approaches and psychometrics) it has become more highly regarded of late (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; King, 1994).

Since qualitative research can enlist the input of key stakeholders in the educational process, it can be used to validate information collected through other channels and from other research. I felt that using a blend of qualitative and quantitative information from teachers would assist in investigating the link between schools, families and communities and the values, attitudes and goals of early years

provision, particularly in light of the rapid changes in society that signal a definite need for education and provision in the early years. My purpose in combining both aspects on the survey was an attempt to, first of all, design a survey that would be relatively easy and time-effective for busy teachers to complete, whilst at the same time, allow opportunities for some reflective input from them. Second, I felt that some of the information I was seeking could most efficiently be gained and analysed through the use of checklists that would generate some statistical information for comparative purposes.

I have taken a somewhat more pragmatic approach than either of the two methods alone could offer. Therefore, it is through the use of eclectic methods- the qualitative tabulation of survey results and the discussion of qualitative information provided by teachers' perceptions and reflections in the interviews, both contextualised in the historical development of early childhood provision, in current practice and in research outcomes- that I have attempted to address the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis.

It is not the superiority of one method over another in the case of this thesis, but the appropriateness of methods needed to address the research problems. Hence, for the purpose of my inquiry, I have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods to examine my hypotheses that early childhood education is an important foundation for children's later learning and that particular elements

must be considered if early childhood provision is to provide effective, high quality education enabling **all** children to progress to their maximum potential.

Janesick (1994, p 209) uses the metaphor of dance to describe qualitative research:

'Because dance is about lived experience, it seems to one the perfect metaphor for qualitative research design.' The important aspect, in my mind, to come out of this metaphor is the reference to qualitative research as 'lived experience'. The outcomes of qualitative research are usually derived from 'lived experiences' which are undeniably constructed from one's perception of the society and culture with which one is familiar. Since teachers are immersed daily in the lives of their pupils, they are truly able to provide their perceptions from 'lived experience'.

It is the teachers' story told here- from voices not often heard in the past (Day, 1991; Shimoni, 1991), but which clearly offer an insider's perception of the changes that children face in their lives and the changes that need to be addressed in their learning. The teachers' voices, although provided by the researcher with a focus on the quality and importance of early childhood education, speak for themselves as evidenced by the responses to the survey questions and by the direct quotes interspersed throughout the discussion in the following chapter.

The teachers' perceptions have been gathered from their responses on questionnaires, their interviews and the feedback from a perceptual check of my interpretations of the interview transcriptions. Although the teachers in Canada and Britain share some similar attributes with respect to cultural background (for instance, the English language and the celebration of some traditional holidays), many differences exist between government (both local and state) expectations and support for early childhood provision. Admittedly, the teachers have an additional common background by the very nature of their involvement in early childhood education, but their perceptions are generally supported by the historical roots of early childhood education, by practice that appears to be effective in many countries and by current research.

It is the intent of this thesis to add teachers' perceptions to the current debate (Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Moss and Pence, 1995; Bertram and Pascal, 1995) surrounding the importance of early childhood education and the nature of high quality early childhood education. The comparative aspect of the study raises some additional issues discussed in the following section.

Comparative Research

In a comparative study of early childhood provision in Canada and England, it is highly possible that transferable elements will be observed and may be of benefit to both. Searching out the roots of meaning results in a better understanding of why things are the way they are today. But, as Phillips (1989, p. 269) emphasises "***...comparative research in education should take into account the historical, political, social and cultural setting of the particular systems and aspects of them. ...Outcomes themselves should not be seen in isolation from the pressures that have produced them.***" Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest two reasons for entering into comparative studies in research. First, they say, it enhances generalisability. Whilst many caution against the difficulties of just this aspect (Woodhead, 1985; Troyna, 1988; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Phillips, 1989), it may well be that careful analysis and consideration of political, economical and cultural contexts can assist in making reasonable generalisations.

A second and more fundamental reason for comparative studies **"...is to *deepen understanding and explanation."*** (Miles and Huberman, op cit., p. 173) It is by examining the constructs of several situations that hypotheses can be minimised or maximised. This reiterates Jennings (op cit.) statement, cited in Chapter 6, Section II of this thesis, that there is no need to bang one's head against a brick wall, particularly when someone else has come upon the wall and found a way around it. Although the way to circumvent obstacles or difficulties may not be exactly the same in any given situation, at least

the trail has been blazed and will be easier for other countries to follow in similar situations. Situational specificity must always be taken into account, but generalisability and comparability offer much to researchers and to policy-makers, as long as they remain cognizant of and attentive to the theoretical parameters of the research (Marshall and Rossman, op cit.).

Structural corroboration, similar to triangulation, attempts to relate several sources of information "***to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs***" (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). As detectives amass clues and links in a *modus operandi*, structural corroboration looks for similarities amongst and between the various types of data that provide evidence for an hypothesis. Miles and Huberman (1994) also highlight the relationship between triangulation and corroboration. They point out (p. 267) that:

> ***"...If you self-consciously set out to collect and double-check findings, testing multiple sources and modes of evidence, the verification process will largely be built into data collection as you go. In effect triangulation (or corroboration, my words) is a way to get to the findings in the first place- by seeing or hearing multiple instances of it from different sources, by using different methods, and by squaring the findings with others it needs to be squared with."***

In the instance of my thesis, I have striven to identify the corroborative evidence pointing to the need for early childhood provision between the historical development of early childhood education, the experiences of Britain, Canada and various other countries, the findings of educational research and the perceptions of those at the heart of educational provision, the teachers themselves. Smith (1992,

p. 100) states that "***Almost everyone now agrees that all observation is influenced strongly by the interests, purposes and values of the observer.***" My own career in the field of early childhood education has provided me with insights into policy development and curriculum practice, but also brings personal values to the interpretation of the work and words of others. As Lather (1992, p. 91) has stated "***Educational research ...both reflects and contributes to the ...growing acknowledgement of social inquiry as value laden.***"

It is precisely because of the vulnerability of qualitative research, particularly in light of the personal values that a researcher brings to the interpretation of data, that structural corroboration is essential. Not only does the researcher consider evidence in support of the problem, but it is especially important ***"...to consider disconfirming evidence and contradictory interpretations or appraisals***" (Eisner, op. cit., p. 111). This thesis focusses upon the importance of quality early childhood education, its impact on future success and the need for government support, both financially and philosophically. Since the development and implementation of twentieth century early childhood programmes clearly indicates the influence of theologians, philosophers, educators and researchers, Section One of the thesis provides an historical perspective, linking their influences to the philosophy and provision in the twentieth century. In addition, it provides a 'contextual overview' of early years provision, not only in Britain and Canada, but in selected European countries, as well as the United States, since the programmes in these countries, too, have had, at times, an impact on the provision in Canada and Britain.

A great deal of research (Bryant and Ramey, 1987; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Schweinhardt and Weikart, 1994; OECD, 1995), including longitudinal studies of early intervention programmes that highlight their apparent cost-effectiveness in terms of changed societal attitudes and life successes and the features that may or may not have contributed to their success, has focussed on the quality of early learning experiences, and inevitably, operates at several levels of analysis, from the micro-world of specific programmes to the macro-world of politics and policy-making. The thesis attempts, in Section II, to explore the impact of several critical factors on the quality of learning experiences in the early years. Most significant is the in-depth examination of parents' initial involvement as their children's first teachers, their continued involvement in a partnership with schools and the importance of self-esteem and language development in making meaningful connections between prior and new learning experiences.

Teachers' Perceptions

Although it is researchers who have been providing information to educationists, parents and politicians on the importance of early years education, teachers, particularly, have a vested interest in the provision of such programmes since supporting learning is at the very heart of their profession. The need for teachers' voices to be heard in the research process and product (Day, 1991) is undeniable. They are key stakeholders in the provision of early education and it is important to ensure that their perspectives are recognised.

Teachers are surrounded daily by the effects of societal change on the pupils in their classrooms and it is in their best interests, as well as that of the children and their families, to acknowledge these changes, to take account of them in planning and to adjust educational support as the needs of the children change. The result of such reflection on change and changing needs, in most cases, will have an impact on teachers' perceptions- more specifically, on the views of the professional culture towards teaching, towards learning and, in the sense of an inclusive partnership, towards parenting.

"I am **just** a practitioner." This statement was made recently by a very capable nursery head as she participated in an open forum at a BAECE (British Association for Early Childhood Education) conference. Unfortunately, it is not an isolated statement, as variations of it can be heard throughout North America and England, and almost always come from early years teachers. This feeling of worthlessness or lowered status amongst early years teachers does not necessarily stem, initially, from their own perceptions. It is often perpetuated by the authorities for whom they work and by the politicians who develop educational policy.

Traditionally, the younger the child, the lesser status the teaching role has been given. Typically, women "form the vast majority- virtually the totality of adult personnel in all kindergartens throughout the world" (Gammage, 1993) and, one could likely venture to extend this statement to teachers of children under the age of eight. Although there has been a welcome shift in the opposite direction in recent years, females seem, in many authorities, to remain on an unequal footing

with men, for example, in terms of the numbers of women heads of primary schools. The disparity in male and female primary heads in Canada and in Britain has its roots, not only in tradition, but often in the fact that women do not seek these positions for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reasons, this inequity also contributes to the lowered status of early years teachers. Early years teachers are often paid a much lower salary than teachers of older children. For example, when the province of New Brunswick implemented a universal kindergarten programme in 1993, the teachers were hired, whether new or from existing programmes, on the basis of a significantly reduced salary in comparison to other teachers in the provincial school system. Although many countries are initiating additions to qualifications for teachers of children under compulsory school age, professional status may also be affected by the differences in their preparatory coursework and the actual time spent in educational training.

However, at the same time as they discount their own worth in the overall picture of the teaching profession, early years teachers generally recognise the valuable place they have in the beginnings of a child's education. These same teachers know that they are at the 'grass roots' level of education. They know how children act and react, how they learn and how their needs are uniquely individual. It is precisely because of the recognition of their own importance in early learning and of the insight that these teachers have that it is important to include the perceptions of these teachers with respect to changes in the 'readiness skills' with which young children enter school. It is the closeness that teachers have to the children in their classrooms that validates their perceptions about child development and 'readiness' in

relation to the changes that have occurred in the family and society in general. Their involvement with the children on a day-to-day basis provides opportunities for continual observation of the actions and reactions of pupils.

Teachers' perceptions are reflections of their beliefs. They can see better, hear better, make finer discriminations and see connections between things, since they are immersed in the 'day to day' business of children's learning, but there is little research that explores the perceptions of early childhood teachers (Shimoni, 1991). It would seem very important that perceptions of the practitioners were better registered and better understood. The legislation for and organisation of early childhood provision is so often a policy-based (local and national) decision, resulting from opinions of the **other** stakeholders. Rarely are the perceptions of the person actually doing the job taken into account.

Teachers' perceptions are important and, indeed, should be taken into account when educational issues are discussed and policies developed. Eisner (1992, pp. 11-12) describes the 'framework dependent character of perception':

'Perception of the world is perception influenced by skill. point of view, language and framework. The eye, after all, is not only part of the brain, it is part of tradition.'

In other words, just as all the influences and values of the child's environment impact on the construction of meaning, so these things influence how teachers perceive change, children and the need for quality early childhood provision.

Within the individual framework of each teacher's perception is some common ground established by the education and acculturation that is unique to a particular society. In the case of early childhood provision, it is the society of those concerned with education: practitioners, researchers, policy makers, parents and the children themselves. Whilst it is important to have multiple voices in the world, and to see things from different points of view, it is the commonalties within the perceptual frameworks that allow for common understanding, and, ultimately, real communication. For the purposes of this thesis, it is the multi-perspective of teachers' voices in different provinces, different counties, indeed, different countries, that I hope will corroborate the evidence of research and practice regarding the importance of quality early childhood education that will meet the needs of children in a changing global society.

In order to understand how the principles of child development and of early childhood education are imbued in teachers' sense of purpose, a survey was distributed to teachers in two provinces of Canada and two counties in Britain. These areas were chosen for several reasons. First, in terms of population, Alberta (2 677 500, 1993, Statistics Canada) and Nottinghamshire (1 380 900, 1993, Notts County Council) both have relatively large populations above the one million mark. Similarly, New Brunswick (753 800, 1993, Statistics Canada) and Mid Glamorgan (544 300, 1993, Whitaker's Almanack) are smaller areas with populations under one million. Second, not only did New Brunswick and Mid Glamorgan share similar economic situations due to shut downs in the fishing industry in Canada and the coal industry in

Britain, but the governments of both economically challenged areas have managed to provide state funds for early intervention programmes.

A third, and somewhat practical, reason was that I had access to key people who could assist with the survey distribution in each of the areas. For my research purposes, I needed access to teachers currently teaching children in the early childhood years. As a result, the four areas proved suitable since the authorities concerned were willing to co-operate, the areas were somewhat convenient for me to access and, as I have stated, I had contacts already established with key personnel in each area which would assist me in gaining access to teachers. Burgess (1984, p 59) suggests that ***'...the willingness of the members of the institution to co-operate with the researcher, convenience and ease of access influence the choice of the location.'***

The questionnaire was designed to gather perceptions and reflections from teachers about the apparent nature of any change in the 'readiness' (refer to the introduction to this thesis for a definition of 'readiness' and an explanation of its use inthe thesis) characteristics of children as they enter their early school experiences. One of my prime concerns was to learn whether or not teachers in Canada and Britain shared a certain set of attitudes and beliefs about these changes and whether these changes would, in fact, indicate a need to ensure that certain elements of early childhood programmes be implemented in order to provide high quality provision for **all** children.

There is no doubt that the social fabric of society is continually changing, and that any changes will have an impact on the development and educational needs of children. I wanted to compare my own perceptions of the societal factors that I believe have figured significantly in differences in children as they enter school in the nineties with the perceptions of fellow practitioners, and to search for similarities or discrepancies between teachers' perceptions in Britain and Canada. The survey was complemented by a follow-up interview of six of the respondents from each of four areas (Alberta, New Brunswick, Mid Glamorgan and Nottinghamshire) in order to probe the details of their responses more thoroughly. Upon analysis of the interviews, each of the 24 respondents was sent a 'perception check' that included a summary of my interpretations of their responses.

Ethical Considerations

There are certain, identifiable issues that relate to the ethical relationship between researcher and subject. Several ethical principles relate specifically to the research I undertook with the early years teachers in Canada and Britain.

First, the issue of ***informed consent***, although more commonly used when subjects may be exposed to risks or lose of personal rights, implies both consent and refusal in relation to social research (Raffle, Bundell and Bibby, 1989; Cohen and Manion, 1995). Informed consent refers to ***'...consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research'*** (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p 372). In order to inform the respondents about my research and my need for their perceptions, each of the

questionnaires was distributed with a cover letter which included the purpose of the questionnaire and a description of the research project. I interpreted the decision of the respondents to complete and return the survey as an indication of their consent to participate in the research.

Embedded in the issue of informed consent are the elements of competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Cohen and Manion, 1995). It was an assumption, on my part, that the respondents, since they were all appointed by education authorities to teaching positions, were able to provide reasonable and relevant responses to the questions asked. Participation was completely voluntary, and although the questionnaires were distributed with the approval of the education authorities, respondents were under no obligation to return the questionnaires. They could opt out simply by not responding. This voluntarism also applied to the interviews. An effort was made with the accompanying letters and pre-interview explanations to ensure that the respondents were as fully informed as possible and were able to fully understand the nature of the research. In spite of these precautions, it is difficult to state with certainty that *every* participant interpreted the explanations in the same way (Burgess, 1984; Cohen and Manion, 1995), but none expressed any concern about their participation.

Second, the letter assured the respondents of ***anonymity and confidentiality*** where the information they provided was to be used in the thesis. In addition to this letter, interviewees were approached only if they had provided written consent on the questionnaires. At the time of the interview, the nature of the research was explained once again

and permission was sought to tape record the interviews for the purpose of transcription. Of course, complete anonymity was lost with those who agreed to a face-to-face interview, since I, as the interviewer, met them; nevertheless, they were assured of personal confidentiality with regard to the information they provided. Any quotes from the questionnaires or interviews were identified using the general reporting categories of 'teacher, Alberta; teacher, New Brunswick; teacher, Nottinghamshire; and teacher, Wales, thereby posing no opportunity for personal identification of a respondent.

A third ethical consideration is that of ***access and acceptance.*** It was not my intention to seek input from teachers in any particular schools or nurseries without the permission of the authority under which the schools operated. Although the actual survey was a one-off situation requiring only a little time and reflection from the respondents, I wanted to ensure that I had official permission to distribute and collect the questionnaires and to continue the research with the teachers who had volunteered and were selected to participate in the interviews. With the exception of British Columbia, of which my problems of access are described elsewhere in this chapter, I was able to find target groups in each of the areas, in Canada and Britain, from which I hoped to obtain research data. In Alberta, I was denied access to one large authority on the basis of the 'inconvenience that would be caused to [their] district'. A second authority in Alberta relayed their intention to participate well after I had distributed the questionnaires to the other ten authorities. I felt that the ten authorities who had responded affirmatively would provide a representational sample of the

perceptions of teachers in Alberta and so declined the involvement of the 'late responding' authority.

Each of these authorities indicated their willingness to assist with distribution and collection of the questionnaires. Several stated that 'The ethical issue of ensuring the anonymity of those teachers who choose to participate [was] understood and appreciated.' Most authorities added cover letters to my information supporting the research and encouraging teachers to complete and return the questionnaires. In addition, several authorities expressed interest in receiving a summary of the results upon completion of the research.

Since the Nottinghamshire education authority operates differently from the Alberta authorities, in that one authority in Nottinghamshire has responsibility for the entire area whilst approximately forty education authorities implement public education in Alberta, it was necessary to seek approval from only one director of education. This approval was given along with assistance in distributing the questionnaires through the education department postal system. The difficulties encountered with distribution of the questionnaires are explained later in this chapter.

New Brunswick and Wales were just as willing to participate in the research. The Early Childhood Consultant for New Brunswick Education provided me with assistance in gathering a mailing list of early years teachers in the province and also collected the completed questionnaires and forwarded them to me. New Brunswick also expressed interest in a summary of the research findings. In Mid

Glamorgan, the office of Education Support and Inspection distributed and collected the questionnaires, along with a letter indicating support for the research and encouragement to teachers to participate.

One further ethical issue worth a brief discussion is that of ***data dissemination.*** In addition to publication of research data, Burgess (1985) discusses additional methods of data dissemination such as oral, visual, and written presentations. As I have stated above, several of the participating authorities requested a summary of the survey results upon completion of the research and I will undertake to provide one as soon as it is feasible. The interviewees were offered an opportunity to be made aware of publication sources and several indicated their interest in such. Burgess (op cit.) also urges that data dissemination take into account the issue of anonymity and confidentiality. The previous discussion in this section indicates that this issue has been addressed and should pose no problems in dissemination of the research data.

The Participants

The survey was developed in October, 1993, and distribution began in Alberta in November, 1993 and continued to the remaining areas on this schedule: Nottinghamshire- January, 1994; New Brunswick- August, 1994; Mid Glamorgan- February, 1995. I purposefully avoided any distribution during the month of December, so as not to coincide with the Christmas preparations with which many teachers would have been involved. In addition to the small pilot survey, discussed further on in this chapter, I received feedback on the initial

draft of the survey from research colleagues who were also, at one time or another, practitioners.

Burgess (1985) describes *opportunistic* sampling as the selection of individuals who have knowledge of a particular social situation, who are available and who are willing to co-operate. *Judgement* sampling refers to the selection of participants on the basis of certain criteria established by the researcher (Burgess, op cit.). The survey sample was, for the most part, opportunistic, although there was an element of judgement sampling as well: the surveys were sent to teachers who had experience in teaching very young children and would therefore be endowed with knowledge about early childhood education. The selection of the interviewees was somewhat more judgemental in that I chose teachers, from the four research areas, who fit three predetermined categories of experience. Burgess (1984, p 75) suggests that non-probability forms of sampling are often used in qualitative research and that ***'Informants need... to be selected using the researcher's judgement... [and[... are selected for their knowledge of a particular setting...'***. Burgess (op cit., p 76) concludes that non-probability samples are a ***'different kind of sampling that has been adopted by field researchers studying their own cultures in order to address qualitative issues concerning what occurs and the implications of what occurs for social relations.'***

Survey Distribution

Initially, my intent was to include British Columbia in the research but access to teachers was not quite so easy in this province, since my initial contact failed to respond. A second attempt, with a different

school board, was no more fruitful. Constraints of time prevailed upon me to forego further attempts at establishing contact with teachers in British Columbia, to confine the Canadian research to Alberta and New Brunswick and to recognise that some of the research would be based on teachers' perceptions and some on official government policy.

I had an opportunity to visit Alberta at the end of October, 1993, and thereby to print and distribute the surveys myself, bypassing the cost of overseas postage. In addition, my professional contacts in Alberta allowed me to access the use of internal mailing systems for distribution and collection of the questionnaires, thereby reducing financial expenditures. In spite of this support (and the questionnaires were often distributed along with a letter of encouragement from the authority) only 111, of the 684 distributed, were returned.

Although personal contacts in New Brunswick were established and the personnel involved appeared responsive and supportive to distributing the surveys, the actual responses were low, but, in comparison, much higher than Alberta response. Of the 100 surveys distributed in New Brunswick, 35 were returned.

Distribution in England and Wales proved somewhat better. The Nottinghamshire Education Officer agreed to distribute the questionnaires through the internal mail system, but post-paid envelopes were included for responses. Due to a misinterpretation at the central post room, many of the surveys were sent to secondary schools. The director of the post room acknowledged the mistake as his own, but offered no compensation or re-distribution of the surveys.

Although 500 surveys were provided for distribution, as far as one can ascertain, approximately 250 actually reached infant or nursery schools. In an attempt to increase the sample, 150 additional surveys were distributed to teachers (who had not received the initial mailing) at early childhood conferences in Nottinghamshire. The final return for Nottinghamshire was 91 out of an estimated 400.

Proportionately, a much higher return was received from Mid Glamorgan (39 out of 100 returned). Again, distribution and collection were facilitated due to personal connections.

Survey Design

Two sections of the surveys and part of the interview questions were taken from existing material in recent reports (Boyer, 1992; Ball, 1994) and I felt, that by using these, I was able to construct something that would have reasonable face validity. In order to provide some frame of reference for the respondents (Converse and Presser, 1986), two of the sections of the survey entailed checklists. The remaining questions offered an opportunity for teachers to express their views of certain aspects of 'readiness' (see Appendix A).

Section I of the survey provides general information regarding teacher experience, education and training, and class size and make-up. The information garnered from this section was fairly straightforward and presented few surprises. Teachers were asked to categorise their teaching experience according to three general groupings: those with 0-7 years experience, those with 8 -15 years experience and those with

16 years experience or more. In addition, they were asked to report their teacher education and training, in terms of degree and/or diploma status and to describe class size (less than 19 children, 19-25 children, over 25 children), class groupings (nursery, kindergarten/reception, year one, year two) and the number of families in their classes with both parents working outside the home.

Research statistics (Boyer, 1992) comparing school readiness characteristics of children in 1986 and 1991 indicate that, in 1991, 42 per cent fewer children were prepared to enter their first year of formal schooling. Boyer's idea, that children should come to school 'ready to learn' is not a new one. The term 'readiness' is a familiar one in educational circles. All children are continually ready to learn, but the degree of readiness is determined largely by the home environment, particularly in the early years. Notwithstanding the impact of the home environment on the child's degree of readiness as he/she enters school, more importantly, the school itself must be 'ready' to meet the unique needs of each of the children. It depends a great deal upon the skills of the teacher to gauge the degree of readiness of each child and to match this to appropriate learning strategies that will extend the child's learning. Thus, the questions in Section II were developed on the basis of seeking respondents perceptions on the concept of 'readiness skills', as well as pinpointing initial assessment techniques that they might use.

Section III asked teachers to rate, on a five-point Likert scale, the degree to which they felt six areas of child development may have been significantly affected by changes brought about by shifts in attitudes

towards women in the workforce and traditional family structures and by changes in other societal factors such as the relative ease of geographical mobility. The specific questions relating to child development were adapted from Boyer's 1992 survey of kindergarten teachers in the United States. The teachers in Canada and Britain were requested to rate the following areas of child development in terms of whether or not they constituted a serious impact upon curriculum development and the teaching climate of their classrooms: language development, emotional maturity, general knowledge, social confidence, moral awareness and physical well-being. Not only has Boyer (1992, p 7) defined these as the 'key dimensions of school readiness', but it appears to me that these are developmental areas which may be in danger of being affected by the societal changes previously mentioned in this chapter. Language provides the basis for making meaning and for communicating with others. My own perceptions, supported by the responding teachers' comments, is that the development of children's language has become an area of concern in the last several years; and related to language learning is concern about general knowledge. General knowledge is generated through discussion, experiences and interactions. One could surmise that deficiencies in language development could possibly affect acquisition of knowledge, at least in terms of the ability to communicate that knowledge.

Development in emotional maturity, social confidence and moral awareness may also have been affected by societal changes. Certainly some teachers indicated in their written comments that often children were anxious about remaining at school without their parents and they

highlighted the importance, and sometimes lack, of social skills such as cooperation and sharing. Wright (1992) suggests that the decline of the traditional nuclear family, often bringing with it a lessening of contact with the extended family, has endangered the development of moral awareness. It may be argued that ***"the teacher's role is even more important in today's society as school and teachers may provide the only consistent experience of moral values that the child encounters."*** (Rogers and Kutnick, 1992, p. 131.)

In Section IV, again using a five-point Likert scale, teachers were asked to rate their perceptions of the importance of certain strategies for improving school success. These strategies, listed below, were suggested by Boyer (1992) upon the conclusion of his research for the American Carnegie Foundation.

• **The importance of parent education.** Improving parent education with the ultimate aim of empowering parents to continue effective involvement in their children's learning is discussed in Chapter Two of Section III of this thesis.

• **The effects of television.** Boyer (op cit.) and Postman (op cit.) have argued that television has had a powerful effect on children's learning

• **The provision of funding for pre-compulsory provision in the form of nursery school.** This issue is currently at the forefront of political discussions, particularly in Britain.

• **Improving the quality of health services for mothers and children.** The premise behind this suggestion is one of early intervention in the form of prevention.

• **The need for communities and neighbourhoods to become involved in education.** Boyer argued, as do others, that communities have a vested interest in education, as they are concerned with responsible citizenship, an attitude that is enhanced and encouraged not only at home and school, but in the neighbourhood and community.

• **The need for workplaces to assist in ensuring quality education by developing policies such as flexi-time and job-sharing.** Boyer points out that this would allow parents to spend more time, either at home or in school, directly involved in their children's education.

• Although few took advantage of it, teachers were offered an opportunity to add their own strategies for improving school success.

Finally, Section V provided an open-ended opportunity for teachers to add other comments that they believed were important with respect to ensuring school success through educational provision in the early years.

The Interviews

Although I developed a list of six questions, three of which came from issues raised by Ball (1994) and three taken from current political issues, at no time was my intent to present the questions strictly as they were written. The list was an 'aide memoire', as Burgess (1989, p 108) calls it, and was meant to serve as a reminder that I would, indeed, address the six issues during the interviews. There was a purpose in presenting these questions, in some form, to each of the interviewees, since I did wish to obtain their perceptions about certain themes, but the questions were not necessarily asked in exactly the same words in each case, nor were they necessarily asked in a particular order. The

interviews, at times, diverted from a focus on a particular question as the teachers raised related issues in early childhood education. In this sense, the interviews could be considered more semi-structured than structured.

The interviews were not meant to be conducted in isolation from other information, but, rather, were intended to further extend the information that was provided in the questionnaires. They were part of the whole research process, including my own knowledge of early childhood education based upon my experience as an early years consultant and teacher, a parent and researcher.

As I have stated previously, the heads of the schools where I interviewed teachers were more than willing to allow me in, thus access to the schools was not a problem. In **all** cases where I interviewed teachers in schools, the heads appeared eager to have the teachers participate in the research. In the majority of schools, the heads found time in their busy schedules to discuss the research with me and to provide me with a tour of the schools. This indicated, to me, their acceptance of the research and interest in early years education.

A crucial component of the interview process is the establishment of a relationship of trust between the researcher and the respondents (Burgess, 1989; Fontana and Frey, 1994). Since it is generally the researcher who is instrumental in establishing such a relationship, it is essential that the researcher conducts the interviews rather than engaging assistants to do so. Establishing rapport with the teachers proved relatively easy since I, as the interviewer, had been a

practitioner as they currently were. Although others have cautioned about the truthfulness of respondents' answers (Marshall and Rossman, 1989), my perceptions were that respondents did answer 'from their hearts'. Since they were under no pressure to do otherwise, it would not have served any purpose to answer dishonestly as I believe that they understood that I was 'one of them'- albeit on leave from the classroom, but nevertheless, a practitioner with the best interests of the children at the root of my investigation.

The interviews were intended to extend the information provided on the survey with semi-structured questions (see Appendix A). Three of the questions were generated from current political issues in early childhood education. The remaining three questions were taken from those posed in *Startright* (Ball, 1994). Respondents were asked to volunteer for the interviews and from those who agreed, participants were selected by virtue of fitting the arbitrarily chosen categories of 'relatively inexperienced' (0-7 years experience- Group One), 'fairly experienced' (8-15 years experience- Group Two) and 'very experienced' (16 years plus experience- Group Three). Interviews with the six teachers selected from Alberta were tape recorded during overseas telephone conversations. Nottinghamshire teachers were tape recorded, but interviewed face-to-face in their schools, although in one case, the teacher was on maternity leave and interviewed in her home. Teachers in Mid Glamorgan and New Brunswick were also interviewed face-to-face in their schools.

Six teachers (chosen from those who indicated their willingness to be interviewed) in each of the selected research areas (Nottinghamshire,

Mid Glamorgan, Alberta and New Brunswick) volunteered to participate in interviews aimed at extending their responses on the questionnaires. The initial interviews were conducted with teachers in Alberta, via long distance telephone from England. Subsequent interviews in Nottinghamshire, Mid Glamorgan and New Brunswick were carried out in face-to-face situations.

Several problems arose with the telephone conversations. Although necessity of distance required that the Alberta interviews be conducted by telephone, several inadequacies with the arrangements were apparent. First, the teachers were interviewed prior to the start of the school day and thus, in some cases, felt rushed. I believe the time the teachers had to reflect upon their answers was probably inadequate and, perhaps, their responses would have been more extensive and reflective in a face-to-face situation. This assumption was borne out in the differences in the responses from the teachers who were interviewed face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews resulted in responses which appear to be more reflective, richer in content and lengthier. As well, I was conscious of the cost of the overseas calls and, as a result, made an attempt (not always successful) to limit each interview to fifteen minutes.

In contrast, the face-to-face interviews with the teachers in Nottinghamshire, Mid Glamorgan and New Brunswick were, at the least, thirty minutes and, more often, 45 to 60 minutes long. The atmosphere seemed more relaxed and reflective as indicated by the time teachers felt they could take to think about their responses. Whilst I did propose specific questions to the interviewees, these

teachers appeared eager to initiate discussion of related topics based on their reflections and responses. Only in one instance did I encounter a respondent who appeared unwilling to share much information with me. One could speculate any number of reasons which could explain her reluctance. Perhaps she felt pressured for time or genuinely had no more thoughts on the particular issues. In any case, I tried constantly to rephrase questions in order to get more detailed responses.

As I have indicated, some problems did arise in the interview process. I conducted all the interviews myself and this meant extensive and expensive travel to the interview communities in Mid Glamorgan, Nottinghamshire and New Brunswick. The positive side to this is, of course, the personal rapport I was able to establish with the interviewees and, more importantly, the valuable information I was able to gather in face-to-face interviews. I have previously described the constraints of the telephone interviews in comparison to the face-to-face interviews.

All the interviews were tape recorded, and although I was familiar with the operation of the recorder, I did manage to lose a small section of one interview from Nottinghamshire when, upon moving rooms mid-interview, I neglected to re-start the recorder. Transcription of the interviews posed few problems. I was unable to decipher some words due to background noise or my own unfamiliarity with a particular accent, but these omissions proved to have little effect on the overall meaning of any particular response.

Overall, I felt that the interviews yielded a great deal of information and did, in fact, extend the survey information, as well as raising additional issues in early childhood provision.

'Perception Checks'

As I have stated earlier, the 24 interviewees were sent a summary of my interpretation of their comments during the interviews. Although the teachers were sent stamped, addressed return envelopes for their responses, actually receiving their responses proved difficult in some cases. The initial return, by the deadline I had provided, yielded 14 out of the 24 sent. Each of the teachers who failed to reply was telephoned and urged to send a response even though the deadline had passed. This resulted in an additional five responses. At this point, I did not contact the remaining teachers again as I felt that their unresponsiveness could be due to constraints of time, commitments at work, or personal reasons. The results of this 'perception check' are discussed in Chapter 8.

The Pilot Study

Fifteen surveys, returned from the Catholic and public school systems in Red Deer, Alberta constituted the pilot study. The city is a small one (with a population of approximately 40 000) but is generally middle class. The unemployment rate is not particularly high. The fairly high per centime of families with both parents working outside the home could indicate that the middle class status is achieved and kept by the contributions of two incomes to the family. On the average, 49 per cent of the children in the classes of teachers who responded had both parents working.

The Red Deer teachers who did respond varied in experience between the three categories identified: that is, Group One having zero to seven years teaching experience, Group Two eight to fifteen years experience and Group Three having sixteen years or more experience. All the teachers who replied had an initial teaching degree from a university - not unusual in itself since, currently (1996), school boards require this qualification. Forty per cent of the respondents had an additional diploma in Early Childhood Education. This is no longer a government mandated requirement in Alberta, but certainly an asset for teachers in the early years.

Early childhood class sizes generally appear to be smaller in these two school districts. None of the respondents, all teachers of kindergarten or year one, had more than 25 children in their class. Kindergarten children attended half days and year one children attended full days. This is typical of Albertan schools. Infrequently, kindergarten children will attend full days, but this generally occurs in rural areas where bussing is needed and the children would weekly attend two full days out of five instead of five half days as the majority of children attending urban centres would.

None of the pilot teachers appeared to have difficulty in answering any of the questions on the survey. A few added clarifying comments to their responses where they felt unusual circumstances needed such clarification. For example, one of the teachers indicated, in response to Question Six of Section IV, that her own particular school already has a high degree of parent involvement due to their workplace policies.

Another indicated '***a lot of baby talk this year'*** when rating Question One on language development in Section III. Another, rating Question Five in Section III, qualified that moral awareness was not a problem '***except with one special needs [child].***' In response to the same question, another teacher felt the need to clarify the nature of her class ' ***because we are a French Immersion class, a major focus is on building receptive/expressive vocabulary.***'

These were only four instances of the fifteen teachers and were, in my estimation, purely personal clarifications where teachers felt a further explanation was needed. Overall, their responses indicated that the questionnaire was straightforward, relatively easy to complete and relevant to perceptions they might hold. Hence, the surveys appeared to have face validity and they appeared reliable in the sense that they seemed to elicit similar responses.

Chapter 8: The Responses

The Survey Responses

Of the 276 survey responses returned, 111 came from teachers in Alberta, 91 from teachers in Nottinghamshire, 39 from teachers in Mid Glamorgan and 35 from teachers in New Brunswick. Although no attempt was made to secure similar numbers of responses from the sample areas, it is interesting to note some similarities between the two larger areas and the two smaller ones. These will be addressed, as they occur, in the ensuing discussion. The frequency tabulations of the survey responses are found on the tables in Appendix B. The first section on the survey provided some general information about the responding teachers (Table 1). The majority of the teachers who responded fell into the experience categories of '8-15 years' (30.07%) and '16 plus years' (44.20%)- the 'seasoned' teachers as Boyer (1992) calls them. Only 25.72% of the respondents had less than eight years experience.

The survey answers and interview information indicate that relatively little movement occurs amongst early years teachers. My own experience as a teacher, administrator and researcher leads me to speculate several reasons for this phenomenon. Once, it seems, teachers secure a position teaching in early years programmes, they are reluctant to move and free positions for new teachers, since it is extremely rewarding to teach young, curious and eager children. Since the majority of early years teachers are women, and quite possibly married, children or family obligations may preclude post-graduate

degrees or job changes that would require a move to a new school, city or educational position. As well, some teachers may feel some degree of comfort and expertise with a particular position and/or curriculum. This information is pertinent to the study only in terms of the breadth of experience in which the respondents have based their perceptions.

189 teachers had an initial education degree, nine had gone on to obtain a masters' degree and 78 had no degree at all (Table 2). The majority of the latter group had teaching experience ranging from 12 years to 35 years. I would venture to say that these teachers obtained their positions before degrees were a requirement. Most of the teachers without degrees came from Nottinghamshire and Mid Glamorgan. Six of the Nottinghamshire respondents indicated that they taught in a nursery where a degree would be less likely to be a requirement. Although many LEAs in England and Wales hire teachers who possess a university degree, it is not a pre-requisite for nursery teachers at this time (1996). All of the teachers from Alberta had at least one degree and often a specialised diploma as well. This is understandable since Alberta public and Catholic School Boards require at least a B.Ed. degree. The purpose of this information is to provide a sense of the specialised education and training which may have affected the perceptions of the teachers. .

With regard to class size and make-up, most of the teachers (47.46%) taught groups of 19-25 children (Tables 3a, 3b and 3c). Almost 16% were lucky enough to teach groups of 18 or less (the range was from 5 to 18). I wanted to elicit this information since I suspected that some teachers may have raised the issue of class size in relation to providing

appropriate programmes. As it turned out, this was mentioned only in passing by one or two teachers whose main concern was not the number of children in any given class, but the lack of added assistant support where class enrollments were, in their estimation, high.

Approximately 11% of the respondents were nursery teachers, the rest taught reception (kindergarten in Canada) through to year two (often called grade two in Canada). Most teachers taught in full day programmes. Those who taught in half day programmes were teachers from Alberta where kindergarten is generally provided on a half-day basis (and, in fact, many of those teachers were, in all likelihood, full-time teachers, but would have been teaching two different groups of children each day- one in the morning, the other in the afternoon).

In both provinces in Canada, teachers reported that over 50% of the children in their classes came from homes where both parents (or the custodial parent, in the case of single parent families) worked full-time at jobs outside the home (Table 4). Surprisingly, this was not the case in Nottinghamshire or Mid Glamorgan where, teachers reported, less than 40% came from such homes. It would be conjecture only, on my part, to attribute this, in part, to higher unemployment rates in these parts of England and Wales. Certainly, in Mid Glamorgan, teachers indicated that such was the case.

The second section of the survey asked teachers to indicate 'readiness' skills that were important for children as they entered school. It was not my intent to enter into a lengthy discourse regarding the concept of 'readiness', since it is a term that is used (or not) differently in different

situations. Rather, I used the term in the context of obtaining information from teachers regarding their perceptions of changes that may be apparent in the perceived prior learning of children who enter their early childhood programmes (see Introduction, p 10). As I stated in Section I, it is the importance of the learning that occurs in the early years, the foundation that this learning provides for later learning and the provision of effective, quality programming in the early years that is the main focus of this thesis. It is my belief that the responses provided by the teachers were indicative of their concerns regarding the lack of some aspects of prior learning that traditionally were apparent when young children entered a formal- as opposed to family-learning environment.

Their responses were categorised into social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills (Tables 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d). Surprisingly, since from my own Canadian perspective and experience, early childhood programmes are more focussed on providing opportunities for social, emotional and physical development, teachers in all areas rated cognitive 'readiness' as the most important of the four (Table 5c). There was very little difference, overall, between the two countries: 80.82% of the Canadian teachers felt cognitive 'readiness' was important, 78.46% of the British teachers felt the same. One explanation for this could well be the current pressures that teachers feel to have their pupils perform well on government achievement tests. Even though these tests are generally given somewhat later than first school experiences, the responsibility for preparing the children for the tests often falls upon the shoulders of the teachers who first receive the children into their classrooms.

In contrast to the priority placed on cognitive 'readiness', overall, the teachers rated physical 'readiness' as relatively unimportant (Table 5d). This also surprised me as I believe that physical development enhances cognitive development and that, as very young children are rapidly developing physically, they need a great deal of time in early years educational environments to continue and enhance that development.

Social and emotional 'readiness' were also seen as important but not to the extent of cognitive 'readiness' (Tables 5a and 5b). The British teachers tended to rate social 'readiness' somewhat higher than the Canadians. This may be explained by the nature of British reception classes, with a more academic focus as compared to Canadian kindergarten classes which are much more play-based and regard social and emotional development as the main mandate for their programmes.

Having identified these readiness skills, most of the teachers in Alberta, Nottinghamshire and New Brunswick felt that the majority of children entering their classes were not lacking in their development of these skills (Table 6). But Mid Glamorgan teachers were concerned and 69.23% of them responded that, in their opinion, children entering their classes were lacking in readiness skills. Almost all the teachers from Mid Glamorgan who indicated a lack in readiness skills identified, in their comments, communication skills, particularly speaking and listening, as areas of concern. These teachers are very concerned about the parent influence (or perceived lack of influence)

on the development of language skills. This is borne out in some of their comments on the surveys:

[There must be] 'early help for parents to help them realise they can make things better for their child.'

'Parents are too busy to spend time with their children and talk.'

'Parents [need] to spend time WITH [the] child.'

'I think parents need to be made aware of how important their role is in the education of their children.'

Although it was the Welsh teachers who highlighted a lack in readiness skills, those teachers in the other sample areas who also indicated such a lack, supported their Welsh colleagues in attributing the lack to less parent involvement (Table 8).

The most important issue in early learning, in the minds of the teachers, is clearly the need for more parent involvement and partnerships with schools. The teachers recognise the valuable contributions that parents make to their children's early education and the need for it to continue as children begin compulsory schooling. The educators and researchers who address the issue of quality in early childhood education usually include parent involvement as one of the components of high quality programme (NAEYC, 1991; Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Moss and Pence, 1994; Bertram and Pascal, 1995; OECD, 1995). The importance of parents of parents to the development of their children in the early years has been discussed in Section II. This issue continues to arise in the teachers' comments and in the interview responses.

In order to find out how teachers decided whether or not children were lacking in certain skills, the next question on the survey asked them to list the readiness assessment tools that they used. Many teachers used more than one method and their responses were separated into three categories: locally made instruments, commercially made instruments and observation (Table 9). Of those who responded, the majority clearly felt justified in using their own professional judgement and based their decisions on observations of the children's interactions in the programmes. In addition to observation, teachers had a great deal of confidence in locally made assessment tools, such as the Mid Glamorgan Profile. Few teachers relied on commercially made instruments, but such a response would be expected, particularly from early years teachers (a discussion of authentic, appropriate assessment can be found in Chapter 11 of Section IV).

Teachers were given the opportunity, at this point on the survey, to add additional comments related to readiness (Table 10). Many teachers remarked, once again, upon the benefits of parent involvement in such areas as language development and listening skills and suggested, tactfully, that parent support courses may be beneficial in assisting parents to understand and utilise the important role they have in their children's learning of communication skills.

'Education of the parents to the importance of the birth to five year development and the role of an enriching environment.' [sic] (teacher, Alberta)

'Programmes to teach parents how to interact with their children, impart a love of learning and knowledge through everyday experiences, how to share literature and appropriate methods of

discipline. Also, programmes that support good nutrition are essential, for example, learning kitchens.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

'Better education at secondary school level about pre-school children, their needs and realistic expectations.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire- obviously stressing the value of 'early intervention' even in parenting skills!)

'I think parents need to be made aware of how important their role is in the education of their children. They need to be shown the ways in which they can help their child learn and succeed. We have just run an eight session 'Early Learning' course for parents with ALBSU. (Adult Learning Basic Skills Unit). [It was] ***good but needs extending.*** (teacher, Wales)

Others made comments which were more direct and display some apparent anger in their comments, suggesting that too often parents use the television as a substitute for their own involvement with their children.

'Parents don't spend time on these activities [reading] ***with children. Children spend more time with TV and Nintendo than human beings.'*** (teacher, Alberta)

'Parents use TV or videos as caretakers ...' (teacher, New Brunswick)

'I wish the parents would play games and talk to the children instead of sitting them in front of the television.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'Parents are too busy to spend time with their children and talk. The television and video is [sic] ***switched on instead.'*** (teacher, Wales)

These additional comments regarding teachers' perceptions of readiness skills, again highlighted the need for more parent involvement:

'The best 'readiness skills' are provided by a secure, loving home in which the child has been able to experience a wide variety of activities; has been encouraged to express his thoughts and

feelings through language; has learned social skills and awareness of other people's needs and feelings.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'What is needed... a parenting program-free- for how parents can assist children from birth to six years to build upon successes regarding 'readiness'. (teacher, New Brunswick)

Section 3 provided some surprising results in teachers' perceptions of various areas of child development. It was the Welsh teachers (72.05% of them) who indicated, most strongly, that language development was a moderate to serious problem (Table 11a). This percentage was calculated by adding the responses of teachers who chose points 1, 2 or 3 on the Likert scale. The cumulative responses were not meant to be summative by any means, but, I believe, they tended to provide rough evidence that teachers were indeed concerned about these particular areas of child development. Again, this was borne out in their previous responses in Section 2 where these teachers highlighted speaking and listening skills as areas of concern. The following comments, by teachers from Mid Glamorgan, indicate the seriousness of the lack of language development in children entering school:

'Increasingly, children are entering school with poor speech, some with none at all.'

'Knowledge of nursery rhymes, stories, etc. indicates that parents are not sharing these sorts of experiences with their children.'

'Many children have little or no language and cannot use language to draw attention to their needs.'

A high percentage of teachers in Alberta (52.25%) and Nottinghamshire (53.85%) also considered language development problematic. These results were similar to those obtained by Boyer

(1992, p 150). 51% of the teachers in his study indicated that language development was a serious problem for children entering school. As their Mid Glamorgan colleagues did, the Alberta and Nottinghamshire teachers often attributed the lack of language development to home factors:

'My theory is- children spend more time in front of TV/Nintendo than reading/talking/participating with parents. ' (teacher, Alberta)

[There is a] ***'lack of meaningful interactions and discussions with parents.'*** (teacher, Alberta)

"Parents don't understand the importance of talking with the child. Although we have an excellent nursery, they can only do so much.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

[There is a] ***'lack of good verbal communication at home.'*** (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

Slightly fewer New Brunswick teachers (48.57% of them) highlighted language development as a problem. There is, perhaps, an explanation for the lower ratings given by New Brunswick teachers. The government-funded Early Childhood Initiatives Programme operates a diagnostic clinic for pre-schoolers in an attempt to detect language delays as early as possible and provide some intervention. Teachers appear to be aware of this service and appreciate the value of the it in terms of developing language delays.

In contrast, the Alberta government has reduced funding for similar programmes. This has resulted in less speech therapy available in the community and at the schools. In addition, nursery provision is minimal, private and filled, for the most part, with children from families who can afford the fees. Nottinghamshire provides access to

nursery places for high numbers of children, but Mid Glamorgan also provides nursery placements for all children and offers Link-Up programmes in many schools as well. So, in one sense, the responses of the Welsh teachers are somewhat incongruous with those of the other teachers. One might assume that the availability of nursery provision and the Link-Up programmes would work together to enhance language development in young children. But other factors are certainly at work in Mid Glamorgan. From interview responses and survey comments, it appears that, in addition to more mothers entering the workforce, the high incidence of unemployment amongst the men in the county may have resulted, in addition to other social ills, in a great deal of apathy on the part of many parents and in many single and young mothers who may lack the necessary skills to encourage language development.

'The area the school services is a social priority area- with a high percentage of unsupported or single parent families. There is a high rate of drug abuse and criminality in this area.'

[There is] ***'general social deprivation in the catchment area*** [and] ***poor parenting skills.'***

'... parents are very young in many cases and do not see the importance of such experiences' [nursery rhymes, stories, etc.]

If that is indeed the case, it only signifies further the need for home/school partnerships and early intervention programmes that include support for parents in their roles as children's first teachers.

The five additional areas of Section III provided some interesting data, as well. Although none of these areas were of such great concern to teachers as that of language development, there was a degree of

concern with each. Teachers from Mid Glamorgan, Alberta and Nottinghamshire provided very similar responses, overall, to the issue of emotional maturity. (Table 11b). New Brunswick teachers, on the other hand, did not indicate such a concern. Perhaps, since their concerns lay so strongly with language development, emotional maturity was regarded as something that would develop as the children experienced the early years programmes.

Again, addressing the issues of general knowledge, social awareness and physical well-being, three areas (Alberta, Nottinghamshire and Mid Glamorgan) provided similar responses in their considerations of whether or not these were issues of concern (Tables 11c, 11d and 11f). Yes, the teachers responded, these areas were moderate to serious problems, but certainly not to the degree that language development was. Reasons for this may be found in the comments added by some of the teachers.

'[These areas] improve between September and June.'

'Progress [in these areas] is usually fast once the child is in kindergarten. '

These comments appear to indicate that these are merely developmental issues and will improve with time in an early years programme.

'So far, the kids I have this year are 'normal' four and five year olds. They respond well to fairness, consistency and large blocks of time in which to pursue their interests.'

'Many parents choose the school because of the small classes and caring attitude. A few children have little social confidence and the parents believe they will be 'better off' in a school with this attitude.'

Clearly, these teachers are aware of the importance of providing a developmentally appropriate, child-centred programme for young children. This, too, has become an issue often connected with the debates on quality in early childhood education, addressed not only by the teachers in this study but by researchers and educators (NAEYC, 1988; Katz, 1993; Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Bertram and Pascal, 1995; Coombes, 1995). It is discussed more fully in subsequent chapters.

The Welsh teachers consider these three areas (general knowledge, social awareness and physical well-being) of significantly more concern, but added no qualifying comments. Perhaps, as with language development, the catchment areas of the Mid Glamorgan schools has a great deal to do with these responses.

Interestingly, when it came to physical well-being, it was the Nottinghamshire teachers who did not consider this much of a problem (Table 11f). Approximately 40% of teachers in the other three areas indicated a concern with the physical well-being of the children that enter their programmes. This appears to indicate that the nutrition, health and well-being of children in the Nottinghamshire sample areas are fairly acceptable to the teachers.

In Section IV, teachers rated the importance of six specific strategies for improving school success. Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that all six areas would, in fact, improve opportunities for children to be successful in school. Once again, it was parent education that received

the most support, ranging from 95% of the Welsh teachers to 100% of the New Brunswick teachers (Table 12a). This overwhelming support continued as teachers agreed that decreasing television viewing would promote more success at school (Table 12b). Five teachers did indicate that their position with regard to television viewing depended upon the nature of the programmes and whether or not they were educational. One teacher was more forceful with the response ***'At least make it [television viewing] appropriate and meaningful, not the 'baby-sitter'.***

Funding pre-school programmes received somewhat more support from the British teachers than those from Canada (Table 12c). This may be easily explained by the difference in the age for compulsory schooling in the two countries. In Britain, five year old children are guaranteed a state-funded, full day programme in reception classes. For the teachers in Mid Glamorgan and Nottinghamshire, funding pre-school translates to funding nursery- an issue that is of current concern in Britain, thus their responses indicate that pre-school education is a high priority.

Alberta and New Brunswick teachers put somewhat less emphasis, but still rated it highly, on funding pre-school, probably for two very different reasons. For both provinces, kindergarten for five year old children is voluntary and, as such, considered pre-school, but it has been a struggle for Albertans to retain government funding for a half-day programme for five year olds whilst the New Brunswick government has recently (1993) implemented a full day programme for children the same age. New Brunswick teachers are understandably

basking in the availability of kindergarten programmes and have the additional support of the Early Childhood Initiatives programme (described in Chapter 5, Section IV) for under fives. Alberta teachers have been concentrating their efforts on programmes for five year olds. Thus, nursery provision is not an issue of current concern for these teachers.

Improving health services was rated similarly by teachers in all four areas. The majority of these teachers felt that health services were, indeed, important for ensuring success at school (Table 12d). Several teachers commented that their particular areas were fortunate enough to enjoy quality health services, but still indicated the importance of such services. Involving neighbourhoods and communities in education was fully supported by teachers in all areas (Table 12e). The percentages of teachers who considered this an important strategy for school success were amazingly similar: Alberta teachers - 92.8%, New Brunswick teachers - 94.3%, Mid Glamorgan teachers - 92.3% and Nottinghamshire teachers - 91.2%. This appears to indicate how strongly teachers feel about extending partnerships in education to include the community as well as families. Providing workplace policies that will allow more parent involvement in schools received similar support from all teachers (Table 12f).

The last part of this section offered teachers a chance to suggest further strategies that they believed would promote success in school. Approximately 15% of the teachers who responded to the survey chose to complete this portion. Several of the Alberta teachers suggested that schools could be more successful if the mandated kindergarten for five

year old children, but, of course, this is an issue unique to Alberta. One teacher suggested that guidance counsellors should be available to early childhood programmes; another that the age of entry for compulsory schooling should be increased. But, on the whole, their responses continued to indicate the importance of parents' involvement and partnerships with schools, a developmentally appropriate curriculum, early intervention for children 'at risk' and continuing professional development for teachers.

These same themes, along with the importance of a positive self-concept and the negative effects of reduced government funding were re-visited as teachers were given the opportunity to provide comments, suggestions and opinions on the last section of the survey. More than half of the teachers chose to make final comments (Table 13).

Together, the responses that are directed to the importance of more parental involvement in the home and of home and school partnerships, indicate that, once more, teachers clearly identified the single most important factor in ensuring school success is parent involvement (Table 13). This supports the beliefs of the American teachers in Boyer's 1992 study. As has been said many times in this thesis and elsewhere, parents are the first and most essential teachers. There is little that can substitute for ***'a supportive family that gives the child emotional security and a rich environment for learning'*** (Boyer, 1992, p 8). But, in today's world, parents often can no longer do this job alone. The wide circle of family and community support that was once available to parents has eroded, but, as teachers recognise, a partnership between family and education can build the support that

may be lacking in may be lacking in the lives of many children. Although the responding teachers also included community agencies in their comments, the comments below appear to provide the best overview of their beliefs:

'Children must have a purpose and desire to learn. Parents must take an active roll to ensure their child is ready, willing and able to learn. The schools can no longer do it all on their own.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

' I think parents need to be made aware of how important their role is in the educating of their children. They need to be shown the ways in which they can help their children learn and succeed.' (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'[It is] very important to gain a partnership between parent- pupil-school to support every field of educational progress.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'The most important thing to ensuring school success is parents spending time with their children teaching them the basics. This is what lacks from society [sic], I think.' (teacher, Alberta)

Several teachers commented on the effects of reduced services in the early years, but this was mainly a concern of teachers in Alberta and New Brunswick. Alberta has, indeed, experienced just such cuts and, no doubt, the effects of these were uppermost in the minds of the Alberta teachers as they completed the surveys. It may be that national media coverage of Alberta's dilemma and the benefits that New Brunswick teachers can see from their own provincially funded kindergarten and Early Childhood Initiatives has made these teachers more aware of the consequences of reduced services.

'Five years ago the Health Unit in our city cut out pre-school screening. This year, of the eleven students in my class of 28 who have speech and language delays, seven were never identified previously in pre-school or by the Health Unit.' (teacher, Alberta)

'[We should be} providing services that are necessary such as teacher assistance for those children who require it and more time allotted for speech therapy and counselling...' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Interestingly, it was the Alberta and Nottinghamshire teachers who shared a belief that early intervention as soon as possible would help in ensuring success at school. I suspect the New Brunswick and Mid Glamorgan feel that their own current situations deal adequately with this issue. New Brunswick, as previously mentioned has universal, state-funded kindergarten provision and Mid Glamorgan enjoys full LEA support for nursery provision and many Link-Up programmes to reach the younger children and their parents.

'The school success of inner city children is highly dependent on programmes such as Head Start, nutrition after school, small class sizes, specialised resources and teacher assistants.' (teacher, Alberta)

'Early intervention has to be equally accessible to all people and sometimes people are not 'poor' enough to qualify for government run programmes.' (teacher, Alberta)

'[We need] special programmes for 'at risk' children which identify them by age three and provides special, individualised programmes for them to give them a good solid foundation.' (teacher, Alberta)

' [We need] early identification of special needs and as much extra help as money allows.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'[We need] money and resources put into early intervention.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'Inner city area parents, on the whole, have all they can cope with feeding and clothing their children. If they can help their child, that is by far the best- but if not, enough adults need to be provided for all children to gain pre-requisite skills between [the ages of] three and five.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

Improving the self-concept of children, although seemingly more important to teachers in Mid Glamorgan, Nottinghamshire and New Brunswick, was another strategy that teachers felt could improve school success. The statements teachers made would appear to support the discussion, in Chapter One of Section II, on the importance of a positive self-concept.

'Every child must feel safe and secure in the school environment. From the start of school life each child must feel they have a part to play and that their efforts, however small, are celebrated.' (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'A happy, stable child will want to come to school and will want to learn and find school life interesting and exciting.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'I think it is important to focus on self-esteem and to help students realise that they will all learn at their own rate. They should not be pushed ahead when they're not ready or held back if 'gifted'. (teacher, New Brunswick)

A few teachers in Alberta and Nottinghamshire indicated that consistency in staff expectations would help to make school more successful for children. Whilst this is an important issue, the fact that only three teachers in each of these areas mentions this could well indicate that it is an issue for the particular schools in which they teach.

As pointed out earlier in this section and by Boyer (1992, p 6)

'Teachers [are] ... an important point of reference. After all, they are with youngsters every day, watching their reactions., observing their relationships with others, noting their struggles and successes. Teachers, especially the sensitive seasoned ones, have a keen, almost intuitive, understanding of children's needs.'

It is my belief, substantiated by first-hand knowledge of university courses in Alberta and second-hand knowledge (from university academics) of courses in New Brunswick and Nottinghamshire, that initial teacher training and education routinely encompasses the philosophies of the early childhood educators previously discussed in this thesis. It is clear from the teachers' responses that the philosophy of early childhood education held by, for example, such educators as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebal, Montessori, Dewey and Isaacs, remains an important aspect of teachers' beliefs about how young children learn.

In addition, the influence of 20th century research documents and reports (for example, the Plowden Report; the Perry Pre-school project; NAEYC position papers) and the apparent success of government-supported early childhood programmes in many countries continue to indicate the importance of providing high quality early years programmes. As the responses above clearly indicate, teachers advocate the need for particular programme elements to be present if young children are to receive maximum benefits from their early education. Both the history of early childhood education and current research, as cited throughout this thesis, support these same elements. Elements such as partnerships, developmentally appropriate programming, and self-concept, amongst many others, are consistently a part of the discussion surrounding quality early childhood provision. The issues raised by the teachers in the survey responses continued to arise in the interviews as well. Although I acknowledge that 'quality' is a difficult concept to define, components of quality continue to be identified by teachers, researchers and educators alike. Following the

responses to the interviews and the 'perception checks', the difficulties of providing an inclusive definition of 'quality' are discussed.

The Interview Responses

As I have stated previously in this chapter, teachers' voices are rarely heard in the political rhetoric surrounding the need for quality care and education in the early years. But teachers are clearly in the best position to observe and identify the changing needs of children. Indeed, their day-to-day involvement with children, particularly when that involvement extends over a number of teaching years, provides clear face validity for their perceptions of the effects of societal change on the educational needs of children. Do teachers perceive that the educational needs of Canadian and British children have changed? How important do they think early years provision is to ensuring maximum success in later schooling and life? What would be the effects of reducing current levels of education funding in the early years? Do they feel that governments should fund nursery provision? What do they consider to be elements of quality early years provision? The interviews were designed to elicit the teachers' answers to these questions.

Across the two countries and, indeed, between the two countries, teachers' responses indicated similar beliefs and patterns. Interestingly though, the six interview questions provided some unexpected data. For example, interviewees in Mid Glamorgan and New Brunswick, the smaller in terms of geographical size and population of the four sample areas, provided perceptions that were very much alike. Similarly, the

teachers from the larger areas, Alberta and Nottinghamshire often shared the same views. Explicit examples will be highlighted in the discussion that follows. Each question is printed in bold for ease of identification.

1. Do you see any effects of maternal employment on the children who enter your classroom?

Responses to this question indicated that teachers often felt that communication skills and social skills were affected in children with working mothers. Although 2/3 of the teachers in the four areas clearly noted these effects, 1/3, including teachers from Alberta, New Brunswick and Nottinghamshire, stated that there were no effects at all. The following quotes illustrate some of the effects that teachers have observed:

'Oh yes. I have seen a difference over the last seven years. ...There are more mothers working before the child actually starts school, so they go out to carers, you know. They miss out on just every day things ... just like the shopping. Because whatever the situation, if you want to chat... when you go shopping... you chat when you're looking at all the [merchandise]. ***... the child's asking 'What do you want now?', 'What's that for?' and the mother is there to answer the questions.'*** (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'I think the effect maternal employment has on some of the children is that they get a sense of disorientation... with the routines of coming to school. They have a great fear of who's going to pick them up and what arrangements are going to be made...It adds a lot of stress particularly in the first month of school to a five year old. (teacher, Alberta)

'Well, I think if we're talking about lacking, I don't think affection is lacking. The thing that does worry me ... is the speech differences. I've been teaching 25 years and about 20 of it with infants, and I've never, ever come across so many with poor articulation and enunciation. (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

Teachers who did not find any particular effects on children's development often qualified their perceptions. They believed that 'professional parents' understood the need for quality time with their children and that these parents ensured that their children continued to feel safe and secure and experience opportunities that encouraged development. Another qualifying perception was that daycare experiences often enhanced some of the developmental skills of children.

'I would imagine that it probably has a lot to do with the way the mum, especially the mum, was raised herself. If she sees reading to the children and things like that a priority, then she probably would do it even though she's busy. I've always worked and I've always done those things with my children. I've just made time for them. But then again there seem to be a lot of parents who feel that the kids can just go and watch TV and get out of the way because they are tired from working all day... so I think it's the difference in parents themselves and probably how they were raised.' (teacher, Alberta)

'... I think that an educated person makes more of an effort than a non-educated person. They've got that background. They know how important it [language development] is.' (teacher, Alberta)

'... basically the mothers who work here work part-time. Some are teachers and they job-share. Some are on supply. I think they are mothers who are working a little bit and really the children come first. So I don't think there's been a change here. I think they're professional parents who are fitting in work and family so that neither suffers... What they're doing is making sure that the arrangements when their children aren't with them are good ones, as well, that they're secure ones...' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'I find a lot of children, because both parents are working, have been in daycare or pre-school and that really helps out with social skills and learning to talk with others.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

2. Do you support government funding for pre-school for 2-4 year old children?

In response to this question, teachers were almost unanimous in their convictions that governments should provide funding for nursery programmes. Teachers firmly believe that quality nursery provision can offer a chance for children, particularly those who may be 'at risk', to experience opportunities for growth in all the areas of development, but most especially in language. They also believe that funding must be available to support quality provision that is accessible to **all** children. Alberta teachers, perhaps cognisant of the recent cuts in their own province, were quick to point out the government funding that is currently available in other provinces, specifically naming Ontario, for nursery provision.

"I think that nursery education is vital. ...Linguistically, they're not getting the language. They're unintelligible when they come to school. A lot are unintelligible. Some have no language at all.' (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

' Yes, I think so [in support of funding nursery provision]. ...especially the families where the children are 'at risk'. And there's so many language delayed children right now...' (teacher, Alberta)

'I think it's essential. ... I think every child three onwards should have a place in nursery because you can see the difference with the children who go to a decent nursery.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'Yeah [I would support government funded nursery]. I notice the children who come at the beginning of the year [to kindergarten] are so much more at ease and so much more confident and they already have buddies when they start school. It's not a scary thing for them. They come to school together and it really helps.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

The lone dissenter, from New Brunswick, made this comment:

'I think our children are doing very well with the kindergarten and I don't think they'd [nursery programmes] enhance any [skills].'

She did concede in later statements that there may be an advantage to pre-school for some children, but her comments also highlighted the little faith she had in government commitment to funding early years programmes. New Brunswick provides an early intervention programme that offers diagnosis and funded programming for children considered 'at risk'. Other teachers applauded the programme, but this particular teacher felt that, whilst the diagnosis was offered, the intervention strategies were not. ***'We just knew who [the children] were and who they were earlier',*** she said. This leads one to assume that this is either a problem peculiar to the area or an experience with a particular child that has caused the teacher to express this opinion.

3. What problems do you see arising due to government cutbacks in funding for early years education?

Most of the interviewees were concerned with the loss of early intervention opportunities should governments reduce funding in the early years. Alberta teachers, particularly (although they have the support of some of their colleagues in New Brunswick and Nottinghamshire), were convinced that a two-tiered system could develop. This would result, they said, in the widening of the already visible gap between children from families that would be able to afford early educational provision for their children before they began compulsory schooling and those that would not.

Teachers were also concerned about the greater expenses that would be incurred in later years of schooling, as schools tried to compensate for the loss of developmental opportunities in the early years. They continued to stress the importance of language development in the early years and how it might well be adversely affected if governments reduced funding in early childhood education. Some teachers felt that funding cuts could result in larger class sizes and parents being required to pay high tuition fees. Since this is clearly an issue that is of particular concern to teachers, especially those in New Brunswick who are just experiencing the positive effects of government funded kindergarten and to those in Alberta who have experienced a reduction in government funding for ECS, I have included more than a representative sample of their comments in response to this question.

'... the damage would be so wide spread ...there would be a delay of two years while the teachers assess what's going on whereas now a lot of 'at risk' kids come in and Early Intervention [in New Brunswick] lets us know ahead of time. ...So if you've got a delayed child and you add on a school delay of two years, you've got a severely delayed child. I can see they're going to have to do it at one end or the other. You're going to have to bump up your alternative schools at the junior high level ... and sink the money in there or you can sink it in earlier where the studies have shown... the younger you catch these children the more chance of success.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

[It will cause] 'more problems later. It's just going to be a band aid effect later on. ... the children who aren't identified early, who have speech problems later on, end up having to work so much longer... a longer period of time trying to correct problems, and I would think in other areas too...children who maybe haven't developed their vocabulary.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

[If the current level of funding was cut] ... we would be coming back to the same situation where the parents who could afford it would be able to provide that ...quality service [pre-school education]. But the

many people that can't ... their children wouldn't get that service and we would definitely see the negative results when they did come to school. They wouldn't be as prepared. That's why we really lobbied, in fact, for the early childhood programme to be implemented at the kindergarten level. We didn't have public kindergarten.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

'I think the one major thing is that as those kids go through school, they have not had the opportunity for early intervention. So for them experiences in learning are limited and delayed because they don't have the opportunity to have that. I think more expensive learning will result for government for these kids because they will be more costly in our educational system.' (teacher, Alberta)

'I think the families who really need ECS [Early Childhood Services- equivalent to reception, although only a half-day in Alberta] ***won't be able to afford to send their children and the children who have a real enriched environment already*** [sic] ***will probably be able to come to ECS. So it will cause two groups- the group who has everything and does everything and the group who doesn't have anything and doesn't do anything and nothing is provided in the school setting either'*** (teacher, Alberta)

'[If funding cuts reduced the time in school for five year olds] I think I would disagree. ...You can actually see the difference in children who have less time...' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

This question did not appear to be of such a concern to the Mid Glamorgan teachers since their LEA does fund nursery provision, and almost every school in the Rhondda valley, where the interviews were conducted, has a nursery. Teachers appeared satisfied that the LEA recognised the benefits of funding early years programmes, particularly as an early intervention strategy, and would continue to do so even if funds were not forthcoming from the state government.

4. Does early learning matter?

Teachers were unanimously emphatic in their positive responses to this question. Teachers appear to be well aware of the importance and

opportunity for learning in the early years. Half of the respondents indicated that learning in the early years formed the important foundation for all later learning. The similarities between the analogies they gave were interesting as the following quotes illustrate:

'Everybody thinks at five, they're [the children] ready to start a formal education. Like a builder with a house... you think now is the time to build a house... if you haven't got the foundation there... you're not going to have a firm building. So you've got to have a builder.' (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'***Everything I've studied in the past eight years would say that early learning is... it's the foundation. Does the foundation of your house matter? ... You build it and you can use all the fancy materials later, but if you're putting it on just a bed of sand, it's not going to stay.***' (teacher, New Brunswick)

'I think it [early learning] should be [important] because it is the foundation for basic education and a foundation for life.' (teacher, Alberta)

'[It is] ... first a start, as far as I'm aware. I think children can learn more... between the ages of one and five... they can learn more than probably at any other time in their lives.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

5. What is the nature of good teaching practice?

All the teachers from Mid Glamorgan, New Brunswick and Alberta indicated, in one way or another, that good practice meant developmentally appropriate learning opportunities (the nature of developmentally appropriate practice is discussed in Section IV, Chapter II).

'... just the fact that if a child is different and they have different styles of learning... you've got to be open to that and sitting at a desk and doing desk work and listening to lectures, it's going to... get some of the kids, but it's not going to get all of the kids. So if you've got visual types and auditory types and tactile learners, et cetera, you've got to be prepared to provide the best kind of environment that

you can... letting the kids DO... It should be the children that are the busiest, the teacher guides them but... working in groups, working in small groups and large groups and individually assisted. I guess you've got to be flexible and try everything that's possible.' (teacher, Alberta)

'... good teaching practice in the early years is the best of the best... developmentally appropriate... taking from the children and extending their learning and what they're interested in.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

'You have to teach them through lots and lots ... hands on experiences is a must... you've got to use your environment, classroom...outside environment...' (teacher, Wales)

Five of the six Nottinghamshire teachers agreed with the other interviewees. In all likelihood, the number would have risen to six, but a tape malfunction in the sixth resulted in the loss of the interview portion which addresses this issue. The following response is typical of the others:

'I think it's provision of stimulus, really... it's not compulsory activity. It's saying this is available, the water's available. What can we do in the sand? It's provision of a stimulating environment for the children.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

The interviewees all appeared to be aware of the elements of a developmentally appropriate curriculum, elements addressing, amongst other things, appropriate assessment, the importance of play in activity based programmes, parent involvement, partnerships, language development and making meaning of the world.

6. How can a universal entitlement to high quality early learning be provided?

Most teachers responded that government funding is the major stumbling block. Several creative suggestions were given that could

ensure increased early years funding from government coffers as well as from alternate sources.

'I think... they have to use taxes from a broader base. They have to use taxes from business as well as personal and make sure that this is a priority. That's the most important thing. They're not seeing it as a priority. They're seeing it as something further down the line and that's not the way it should be. That's not where the focus should be. These children are our future and they're not treating them as such.' (teacher, Alberta)

'We have, at our school, a parent association. We are allowed to raise money and then allocate that money to different areas of education for the needs that our school has and I believe that private businesses should be allowed to make donations to that parent association or individuals and sponsor children who really need to go to school and parent groups can offer tax receipts ... People would sponsor a child to go to school, I am sure.' (teacher, Alberta)

[The government] ***never seems to be able to cut back on some of the other things... They could cut back on a lot of things... all the lunches that they go to...'*** (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'I think that it should be in the schools. I mean not just nursery school. I mean the whole day-care should be brought under the same umbrella with the school system.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

'Only to make it compulsory.' (teacher, New Brunswick) Kindergarten is voluntary in this province.

In addition to the above comments, most teachers repeatedly averred that governments must adequately fund early years programmes and provision. In seeking state funds, teachers suggested that politicians must see early learning as a priority. They must come to realise the benefits of the optimum learning that occurs in the early years and increase early years funding particularly to lower pupil/teacher ratios and to increase resources. As the above comments indicate, these funds could possibly be obtained through broader tax bases both in the personal and the business sectors, through more efficient management

of the money that is earmarked for early years, from government run lotteries and by decreasing lavish spending at government functions. Furthermore, teachers said, government standards for nurseries in both countries are currently problematic. The following quote illustrates the rationale for this belief:

'[Monitoring public programmes for quality]... is extremely important. It [sic] can be monitored and the standards could remain high, whereas if it's privately run... it can still be quite detrimental depending on what programme they're [the children] going to. It could be somebody who is teaching kindergarten but doesn't have the early childhood philosophy... a well-meaning teacher who just doesn't realise, could be teaching them in a form that is really inappropriate... where they're sitting too long and doing ditto sheets.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Currently, private nurseries in Alberta and New Brunswick are monitored with regards to health and safety standards, but there is no government requirement that the operators have any training in early childhood education. Neither are there government guidelines for nurseries in these two provinces since they are privately funded with user fees. The play groups in England are privately run, for the most part by parents with little training, and are often the only recourse for children in areas where the LEA does not operate a funded and monitored programme.

It appears that Canada and Britain could benefit from an evaluation framework that assessed programmes against standards of quality such as those identified by Bertram and Pascal (1995) and discussed in Section IV, Chapter 13. Whilst one teacher was concerned that such standards may be problematic for smaller nurseries, I would argue that

point and hope that standards of quality could be assured in a nursery of any size.

Inherent in the interview responses are indications that 'make do', 'just enough' or 'traditional' early childhood provision is no longer as effective as it once was. It is clear that these teachers were well aware of the emerging needs that societal changes appeared to have wrought in young children and their families. In addition to the commonalities in the answers to the identified questions, certain other common themes began to emerge from the interviews. As well as discussing their perceptions which were directly related to the questions asked of them, most of the teachers focused, in one way or another, on issues such as the importance of early intervention, self-esteem, parental involvement and partnerships and a developmentally appropriate curriculum, including the importance of play, in the education of young children. Section IV discusses several features of successful, high quality early childhood provision. Teachers' comments will be used throughout that section to illustrate their belief in these same features that have been identified by researchers and educators.

'Perception Checks'

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the 24 interviewees were sent a summary of my interpretations of their responses to the interview questions. This was done as a 'perception check', a form of 'concurrent validity', to ensure that I had, indeed, interpreted their comments with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The cover letter to the teachers stated that I had attempted to 'capture the broad sense of

meaning from our discussions' (see Appendix A for a copy of the letter). I summarised the responses to each interview question, pointed out the additional themes that emerged from the interviews, offered teachers an opportunity to comment further on these themes and, finally, asked the teachers to indicate their perceptions of the meanings of three concepts related to early childhood programming for children between the ages of two and one half and eight years.

Nineteen teachers responded to the 'perception check': all six from New Brunswick, five of the six from Alberta and Nottinghamshire and just three from Mid Glamorgan. The lack of response from Mid Glamorgan was partially due, I suspect, to the fact that the 'perception checks' arrived during the term break and the return date may have appeared unreasonable once the teachers returned to school. A telephone reminder, with an extension of the return date brought no further responses.

The nineteen teachers were unanimous in their agreement of my interpretations of their comments. They accepted the general perceptions I provided to each interview question and two of the teachers provided added comments to three of the questions.

1. My summary of the responses to the question regarding the effects of maternal employment on children included the observations that some teachers 'felt that professional parents understood the need for quality time with their children' and 'that daycare experiences often enhanced some of the developmental skills of the children'. A teacher from New Brunswick, although indicating her agreement with the

summary, stressed the importance of 'quality' time and quality daycare. She expanded her notion of quality further in her perception of the meaning of quality. Quality in programme provision was, she responded, ***'activity based, appropriate to the child, to meet the (child's) needs and enhance skills: social, intellectual and physical.'***

2. A teacher from Mid Glamorgan, whilst not disagreeing with the summaries provided to the question regarding problems that might arise due to government funding cutbacks for early years programmes and the question regarding the provision of a universal entitlement to high quality early learning, added her thoughts with reference to the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme. Her comments indicated her dissatisfaction with the scheme in terms of the eroding effects it may have on the schools that currently provide nursery programmes. She also felt that the money designated for the nursery vouchers could be better used in providing daycare facilities for under threes. (NOTE: The voucher scheme has been abandoned by the current Labour government, 1997).

None of the teachers took the opportunity to add further comments relating to the additional, common themes that emerged from the interviews. I interpreted this as acknowledgement that the issues of early intervention, self-esteem, parental involvement and partnerships and a developmentally appropriate curriculum, including the importance of play, were, indeed, important in early years provision.

Finally, the teachers were invited to provide their perceptions of three concepts: 'quality in programme provision', 'readiness' and 'cognitive

skills'. The relevance of the first two concepts has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis. The latter concept was included because the emphasis in early childhood programming, in my own experience (in Alberta) has been on the development of social, emotional and physical skills. Cognitive development was not ignored, by any means, but included opportunities to enhance thinking skills (for example, problem-solving, organisation, prediction), communication skills (most importantly oral language development) and opportunities to explore, construct and communicate meaning. I wanted to ensure that my interpretation of cognitive development closely matched that of the participating teachers. Fortunately, this was the case with the nineteen teachers who returned the 'perception checks'. Following are some examples of their perceptions of the meaning of cognitive development:

'Research substantiates (sic) ***a strong relationship between play and cognitive development. Play encourages problem-solving, divergent thinking, creativity, representational thought and concept development. Play also provides a rich environment for language development.'***

'... the ability to think and learn, the ability to remember..., the ability to understand and demonstrate the ideas of others, ...transfer of knowledge, the ability to generate new ideas..., the ability to continually modify your ideas, the ability to reflect, criticise and evaluate ideas...'

'Skills which require the application of thought, intellect, logic, memory.'

As with cognitive skills, teachers perceptions of 'readiness' appeared to concur with my own as described in the introduction to this thesis: that is, prior learning that has occurred from experiences before

entering an educational setting and the learning that occurs in that setting enabling them to move on to more sophisticated or challenging activities. Teachers indicated the important part that parents play in 'readiness'. One respondent, although she qualified her response as 'cynical and 'probably inaccurate' stated that ***'...a teacher's role is to sow seeds and constantly encourage <u>every</u> child. ... but they may never be 'ready' if they background has not been rich and stimulating.'*** But teachers did not expect parents, although they have an important role to play in the process, to be wholly responsible for ensuring 'readiness' at every level of the children's development.

The following quotes are illustrative of the overall responses:

[Readiness is] ***'The point at which a child has gained sufficient and appropriate preparatory and formative experiences to be 'ready' for being introduced to a new skill: the success of which is dependent upon those preparatory and formative experiences.'***

[Readiness is]***'An indication that a child has progressed to the next stage of development and is ready for new/different kinds of challenges.'***

[Readiness means children are]***'Prepared to meet the challenges of the next level of development.'***

Interestingly, instead of providing a definition of the meaning of 'quality in programme provision', the teachers listed what could be considered components of 'quality'. In no particular order, 18 teachers

listed the following as important components of quality provision:

- trained and educated staff with specialist knowledge of early childhood education
- continuity in learning that provides for articulation from year to year
- universal entitlement
- developmentally appropriateness
- setting programme goals
- outcomes
- high standards
- services are integrated to provide for children's needs
- early intervention

Discussions surrounding developmentally appropriateness (which is discussed more fully in Chapter 9) include several of the components that teachers listed as important to quality provision. Teachers indicated the need for partnerships, including parent involvement, for the development of a positive self-esteem, for the recognition of each child as an individual with unique needs, for the recognition of the importance of play in learning, for the provision of learning opportunities that are meaningful and to ensure that assessment reflects the process of learning. These components are generally included in the overall concept of developmentally appropriate provision (NAEYC, 1991; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1992; King and Chapman, 1994).

Similarly, in addition to identifying the setting of appropriate programme goals as a component of quality provision, teachers included other aspects that could be considered a part of goal setting.

These are the previously mentioned components of developmentally appropriateness and the notion of outcomes. The quality of pre-school experiences is an indicator of later success (Boyer, 1992). Research evidence (Jarousse et al, 1991; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1994; Sylva, 1994b; Fuerst and Petty, 1996;) provides a clear indication of the positive outcomes from high quality provision in the early years. In addition to the long term social and emotional effects identified by the above research, quality early years provision offers young children more immediate opportunities such as developing language skills, gaining social confidence, developing a sense of right and wrong and developing abilities to co-operate and share (Boyer, 1992).

One teacher from Alberta, did not provide any of the listed components, but, instead, indicated that quality would suffer due to a lack of funding resulting in qualified people moving out of teaching roles in the early years. Initially, I attributed her concern to the current state of affairs in Alberta, but upon reflection it appeared to me that funding, indeed, is a component of 'quality'. The provision of adequate funding would be more likely to result in a universal entitlement, in the assurance of high standards (since, presumably, governments would institute a system of monitoring and evaluating programmes that were using state funds), and in integrated service provision that could ensure early intervention for children 'at risk'.

With the responses to the 'perception check', I felt reasonably certain that I had correctly interpreted the teachers' comments and responses to the questionnaire and the interviews. Inherent in all their responses is the message that changes in society have brought about changes in the needs of children. Teachers are not saying that parents love their children less or that they want less for their children. What they are saying is just what has been said elsewhere in this thesis: that increased fragmentation of family life due to alterations in the traditional concept of 'the family', increased mobility, more mothers entering the workforce, economic instability and rapid technological change have resulted in the changing needs and attitudes of children, particularly in the early years where the foundation for later learning is laid. As the teachers and researchers quoted in this thesis have indicated, provision of high quality programmes in the early years is an attempt to ensure that **all** children have the opportunity to develop to their maximum abilities in order to improve their prospects for the future.

Quality in Early Childhood Programmes

The word 'quality' has been used throughout this thesis in reference to early childhood programmes. In the introduction to the thesis, 'quality' in early childhood programmes is described in the words of Moss and Pence (1995, p 2) as '*... the adoption of an essentially holistic approach...*' which includes an understanding of '*... the*

underlying dynamics of a particular service' and the extent to which the service meets its goals and objectives.

Although an emphasis on quality has been the focal point of recent discussion surrounding the nature of early childhood provision, some educators and researchers (Powers, 1993; Moss and Pence, 1994; Abbott, 1994; Bertram and Pascal, 1995) are gravitating towards the qualifying terms of "good" quality or "high" quality. Moss and Pence (op cit.), in their attempt to examine 'quality' in early childhood education, argue that it is a word that has often been widely overused and ill-defined. The issue centres on evaluating what is meant by good or high quality programmes and focusing on the issue of quality from the perspectives of different stakeholders. For example, parents, teachers and children will have different and varying needs according to their particular country, cultural or ethnic background. In the instance of racial equality, most countries now take the position that equality is a fundamental right of **all** children. Therefore, measuring the quality of an early childhood programme necessitates an awareness and understanding of issues relating to equality.

This issue of quality is central, not only to much of the research, but to much of the discussion on both practice and the effective training of personnel. Researchers in many countries repeatedly refer to it, but it is an elusive concept, since the quality of early childhood programmes is dependent upon the values of the society in question. Above all, quality programming must meet the needs of the children of a particular society; at the same time, it will be steeped in the culture, traditions and values of that society.

Few would dispute the need to evaluate early childhood education and care, but problems may be encountered when one attempts to generalise a quality ratings scale that has been developed in a specific country or area. For example, materials designed to evaluate a programme offered by any particular First Nations Tribal Council in Canada would not easily generalise to many other countries, simply because First Nations people, the provision for their education under the British North America Act and their reserves of land are unique to North America. But there may be aspects of such an evaluation model that could be transferred to collaborative initiatives in other countries.

The fact is that the values held by the developers of quality rating scales and the different contexts in which they may be used, render it virtually impossible to design an evaluation scale that will suffice for all settings. Values that have been instilled through culture, tradition and ethnicity are bound to affect those who develop the policy, aims and objectives for early childhood care and education programmes. Although many issues may be unique to specific cultural backgrounds, these may plant seeds of ideas that could be generalised to other, similar situations.

A wide spectrum of issues surrounds the values bases and criteria of those who evaluate the quality of early childhood services. Nevertheless, many educators accept the idea that the majority of issues are steeped in the philosophy that the definitions and the evaluating criteria of quality must remain flexible and stem from the

values bases of those who will be most affected by the programme. Indeed, those who wish to define and evaluate the quality of early childhood services, must pay attention to the cultural climate of the stakeholders, to the traditional social and political practice, and to the outcomes of research and evaluation of the concepts of quality ***"based on a recognition and understanding of cultural, environmental and social diversity"*** (Moss and Pence, op cit., p. 177).

Moss and Pence (op cit.) have drawn upon the expertise of seventeen early childhood educators from Canada and several European countries in an attempt to examine 'quality' in early childhood education. They begin from the perspective that it is a word that has been freely used and widely misused. In an attempt to develop a better understanding of this concept, Moss and Pence propose two meanings of the word 'quality'. The analytic and descriptive meaning of quality, they argue, focusses on continuity in learning, on developmentally appropriate practice, on careful attention to multiple and sensitive styles of assessment and monitoring, on carefully trained personnel, and on appropriate adult: child ratios.

The concept of continuity in learning refers to the degree to which there is a smooth transition of curricular activities from home to pre-school and from pre-school to compulsory school. Many practitioners and theorists believe it to be imperative that the curriculum of the early years should not be dictated by the later stages (and assumptions) of formal education.

Developmentally appropriate practice, identified by Moss and Pence as another issue related to the concept of 'quality', concerns practice based upon knowledge of typical child development patterns and emphasises the role of personal relevance in order that educators may design the most appropriate learning environment for each child (NAEYC, 1988, 1990, 1991). Developmentally appropriate practice considers both the age and the individuality of each child, but without 'pigeon-holing' children into preconceived ideas of developmental ages and stages. Developmentally appropriate practice includes a curriculum which addresses all areas of the child's development through an integrated approach, curriculum planning emphasising learning as an interactive process, careful initial education and training and continuing professional development for teachers and caregivers.

These elements, in addition to assessment, teacher education and programme planning which are discussed in subsequent chapters in this section, contribute to the analytic meaning of quality. In reality, it is the child's experience that is the true determinant of the programme's effects. The most important question to answer when considering the analytic quality of early years provision is 'What does it feel like to be a child in this environment?' (Katz, 1993).

The evaluative meaning of quality (Moss and Pence, op cit.) refers to assessing to what extent the goals and objectives of the programme are met. This includes evaluation of the programme itself and the notion of appropriate assessment of children, which, particularly in the early years, depends a great deal upon teachers' observations of children's

behaviours in a variety of settings and situations and upon teachers' recordings and evidence of developmental progress. Children are unable to opt out of the assessment system in educational settings, but educators can ensure that it is appropriate, authentic and unconditionally accepting of the developmental uniqueness and individuality of very young children.

Moss and Pence concede that most currently used quality ratings scales are often checklists aimed at evaluating general, observable characteristics of early childhood programmes and at evaluating the structural features that guarantee safety for the children who attend the early childhood setting. Indeed, this approach often satisfies parents, politicians and other stakeholders since they may be more concerned about preventing harm to the children than maximising the benefits of the educational programme.

Bertram and Pascal of the Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project in England have suggested quality indicators for programmes that promote effective learning in the early years. Although the EEL Project focuses on nursery provision, the indicators are equally as meaningful as a child progresses to reception or kindergarten classes and are no less important in the ensuing infant years.

Bertram and Pascal (1995) have identified the following indicators of quality in nursery provision:

- A high ratio of trained staff

- Positive relationships and interaction amongst the children, the parents and the staff

- Parental involvement which is co-ordinated and offers opportunities for home/school and school/home communication

- Equal opportunities of access for all children

- A curriculum that is child-centred and developmentally appropriate (see Chapter 9, Section IV, Developmentally Appropriate Programming)

- The aims and purposes of the programme meet the needs of the children and their families

- On-going monitoring and evaluation of the programme

- A physical environment that is safe and meets the developmental needs of young children

- Planning, assessment and record-keeping that is continuous and authentic (see Chapter 11, Section IV, Appropriate Assessment)

- An emphasis on play and talk that encourages exploring, constructing and communicating in meaningful situations

The work of Bertram and Pascal is but one example of an attempt to provide a tool for evaluating quality. It can provide a starting point in the establishment of goals and objectives and the development of quality indicators and evaluation criteria for early childhood programmes, not only in England, but in other countries as well. Indeed, Bertram and Pascal have introduced Ireland and the

Netherlands to the EEL Project which includes the possibility of using their rating scale in these countries.

High quality early childhood programmes clearly have an impact on children's later schooling. In the forward to *Heart Start* (Zero to Three, 1992), Boyer states ***"Above all, we now know that later learning depends heavily on what happens to a child in the first few years of life."***

Heart Start goes on to cite two long-term American studies whose conclusions indicate, among other things, that children and their families who have participated in high quality early intervention programmes are, after ten years, less likely to be involved with the law, doing better academically, need less special education and are less likely to be truant. The important features of these particular programmes are early intervention (before the age of compulsory schooling), the co-ordination and integration of services (health, education and social services), and adaptation to the individual needs of the child and the family.

There appear to be critical areas that researchers (Moss and Pence, 1994; Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Bertram and Pascal, 1995; OECD, 1995) have suggested for consideration in the development of quality indicators and measures. Those who wish to define and evaluate the

quality of early childhood services must pay attention to the cultural climate of the stakeholders, to the traditional social and political practice, and to the outcomes of research and evaluation of the concepts of quality based, as Moss and Pence (op cit.) have stated, "...on a recognition and understanding of cultural, environmental and social diversity".

Although it can be argued that their language is the same and, perhaps, their education has been based upon similar teachings, the teachers in this study come from different cultures, with differences in the political administration of education and differences in teaching traditions. But the teachers in the four areas have indicated by their responses that they do, indeed, share similar attitudes and beliefs about the essential nature of high quality education and care. In addition, they agree upon the importance of the early years as a foundation for children's later learning. Finally, they have identified certain components that they believe are essential to the provision of effective, high quality early childhood education.

Section IV will examine features, as identified by teachers, by researchers and by the historical roots of early childhood education, that may contribute to successful programmes for young children. In addition, this section will describe several models of early years

programmes, in Canada and in Britain, that appear to be providing high quality provision designed to meet the needs of today's children.

Section IV: Features of Successful Early Childhood Programmes

Successful early childhood programmes can only be established and best realised through a comprehensive approach, which seeks to involve the families, the schools and the communities in an attempt to meet the unique and often diverse needs of all children (Boyer, 1992; Coombes, 1995; Little and Meighan, 1995). Although the need exists for a systematic whole school approach that, indeed, includes a curriculum, it is imperative that schools accept the responsibility to teach **all** children effectively, including children considered to be 'at risk' due to diagnosed or perceived cognitive, physical and, at times, economic conditions. Schools, and often in conjunction with other community services such as the Health Authority and the Social Services Department are attempting, in many countries, to provide various forms of comprehensive and co-ordinated programmes that are designed to alleviate or reduce difficulties that may be experienced by children 'at risk' since these conditions may be seen as a hindrance to the optimal learning opportunities of children.

A framework for ensuring quality provision is essential and particular elements, such as developmentally appropriate programming, setting goal statements, ensuring appropriate assessment, effective teacher training and education and establishing partnerships in learning are vital components of such a framework. These elements, along with descriptions of existing programmes that appear to be effective, will be discussed in the ensuing chapters in this section.

Elements which have been identified as essential to effective provision in the early years are discussed in Chapters 9 to 13. Certainly two of these elements, developmentally appropriate programming and partnerships (with parents), have long been considered to be important aspects of early childhood education. They continue to be supported by recent research and, together with the need to set appropriate programme goals, the need for appropriate assessment of children and the need for appropriate teacher education and training, are ones that I support from my own experiences as a parent, a teacher, an early years consultant and a researcher. Wholehearted support for these elements is also found in the survey responses and the interview responses from the sample teachers in Canada and Britain.

Often, effective schools or early intervention programmes have reached Jennings 'brick wall' (see Section II, Chapter 6) and can provide, if not a framework that can be used by other schools or programmes in totality, at least a model upon which to establish workable goals and programmes that will meet a particular community's needs. The schools and programmes highlighted in Chapter 13 of this section are not meant to be inclusive, by any means, and obviously constraints of time and space have necessitated a limitation to the number that can be examined. Those chosen were done so purely on a personal basis. Either their philosophies and implementation models appealed to me when I read about them or, as was the case with two of the Canadian examples, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to visit the programmes discussed. These are meant to illustrate how successful models of early childhood programmes have incorporated elements that promote successful learning opportunities for children.

Chapter 9: Developmentally Appropriate Programming

A growing number of educational associations (California Department of Education; Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, Georgia; NAEYC; New Brunswick Department of Education; Alberta Education; Metropolitan Borough of Wirral; Cheshire County Council; Mid Glamorgan County Council) have embraced the notion of a developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children, that is, age appropriate and individual appropriate. In such a programme, emphasis is placed on ***'active, hands-on learning; conceptual learning that leads to understanding along with the acquisition of basic skills; meaningful, relevant learning experiences; interactive teaching and co-operative learning; and a broad range of relevant content, integrated across traditional subject divisions'*** (NAEYC, 1990 p 22).

It is the needs of the children that are paramount in the school, and whilst social, economic and political forces have engineered change in society over the years, the basic developmental needs of children have remained constant. The demands of a National Curriculum in England, along with the ominous presence of attainment targets, may pressure teachers into presenting nursery and reception children with a more structured and inappropriate version of the curriculum, one designed to prepare them for the Key Stage I SATs, taking little note of individual differences and rates of growth and development. The problem of a downward extension of primary school into kindergartens and nurseries can be easily overcome by ensuring developmentally

appropriate practices match the child's developmental level (Little, 1995).

Children often come to their first school experience like Zorba's butterfly (Kazantzakis, 1952)- from the security of their home cocoon, where they have plenty of time to stretch out their wings- all too often to a school environment where expectations may be unreasonable for some children. It is important for educators to ensure that the "butterflies" that arrive in their classrooms have a chance to let their wings dry so they can fly. Instead of expecting children to come to school prepared for the rigid demands of a highly specific curriculum, it is the schools that must meet the needs of **all** children and endeavour to provide opportunities that will maximise progress for every child for every year.

Alberta Education (1990b) states that ***"...learning is a continuous experience and children learn in different ways and at different times, even though they happen to be the same age".*** In order to provide continuity in learning for children, it is important for schools to develop instructional practices that are based upon principles of child development. These principles are conclusions formed by researchers in education, and allow for a broad range in children's needs, learning rates and styles, knowledge, experience and interests, with the underlying factors being that children are individuals and that each child is unique.

There does not appear to be an established set of principles of child development that are used universally. Educational researchers have

identified many important principles that enable teachers to provide instructional programmes that do maximise progress for their pupils and I have chosen the following ten to illustrate principles which are compatible with continuity in learning. Quotes from the teachers in Canada and Britain provide support for the importance of these.

Children need a positive self-concept in order to develop their individual potentials. As stated in Section 2, Chapter I, the way children feel about themselves is related to the way they learn (Bruner, 1960; Phillips, 1994). This idea, that children with a positive self-concept are more likely to become involved in learning activities, is highlighted in many countries (Spain, Odina, 1993; Italy, Pusci, 1993; Sweden, Bergman, 1993; Canada: British Columbia, 1992 and Alberta, 1988b). As children receive positive feedback from teachers and classmates, their self-concept is likely to be enhanced and they are likely to gain the confidence needed to try other learning activities.

Positive self-esteem can be encouraged in programmes that offer choice and exploration in a wide variety of areas and present children with frequent opportunities to meet and master meaningful challenges. Receiving positive feedback, from the teacher and from peers, will support and nurture feelings of productivity and success in the learning environment.

'Self-concept is the key. Kids need to have the confidence to try new things in order to grow and learn.' (teacher, Alberta)

'I look for social-emotional readiness rather than academic readiness. Academic learning comes along better if the child has a good self-image and sense of belonging.' (teacher, Alberta)

Children need to make meaning of their world, based on the experiences they have already learned, experienced and constructed. (Piaget, 1977; Caine and Caine, 1991). In early years, experiences enhanced by continual and meaningful involvement and interaction with the environment set the pace for future learning. Children need to be encouraged to make connections between new knowledge and old, and to use this information to solve problems and to make sense of new experiences. Teachers must recognise the importance of the children's previous learning as a basis for new learning (Dowling, 1995). As children realize the importance of their own knowledge and experience to the learning process, they will become more involved and begin to take ownership of it.

Good teaching is*'...providing as much exposure as possible to the different things that are available to children at this point in time...that they can enjoy, that they can incorporate into their daily living to help them understand what's going on around them as well.'* (teacher, Alberta)

Children should be involved in active rather than passive activities. (Katz and Chard, 1989). Although rapid physical growth generally slows down after the age of five, children in the early years of school, including reception and year one, need physical activity to help them comprehend new concepts. Children should have opportunities to manipulate real objects instead of just reading about them, looking at pictures of them on a workbook page or listening to teachers tell about them. As they actively engage in manipulative, learning activities, children will make connections to real-life situations. The establishment of an environment which links children's

explorations to their developing concepts in the different areas of the curriculum is of paramount importance in the early years.

'They need a programme that provides movement. ...I feel there should be a science centre with sand and water and all kinds of equipment for exploration and learning and discovery. Every centre would promote language development. It would promote social activity. There should be a reading centre with all kinds of books... and a nice cosy carpet and cushions and pillows and a listening centre with a tape recorder and there should be a writing centre. Even my three year olds used to write stories. They could draw pictures and they knew what their stories were saying. ...There should be a block centre, a home centre, a computer centre would be great...' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Children acquire, develop and express their understandings through the use of language- written and oral language develop concurrently (Lemke, 1987). When children engage in interactive conversations with peers and teachers, their communication skills are strengthened, enabling them to express in writing the understandings they have acquired through talk. In order to receive, process and express an understanding of what occurs in the learning environment, children need to successfully acquire and use language and thinking skills. Unless the learning environment offers opportunities for dialogue, paraphrasing and extending meaning, language, as a vehicle of thought, will not be utilised to its maximum potential.

'Familiarity with books and a positive disposition to reading starts at home and should continue during all pre-school experiences. The reading-writing connection is very important...' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Children pursue learning in a holistic way, without restrictions imposed by subject area boundaries. (Caine and Caine, 1991). All the domains of development- social, emotional, cognitive, physical and

creative- are integrated. Each influences and is influenced by the others. Children are continually making connections between the knowledge they have acquired in the different domains and do not need to distinguish learning by subject area.

'Purposeful learning- integration of subjects through projects which are connected to the student's lived experiences are extremely important starting with pre-school education.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Children vary widely in their rates of physical growth and the timing of their growth rates (Alberta Education, 1988a). Each child is a unique individual with an individual pattern and timing of growth (NAEYC, 1990). Children need a variety of opportunities to meet the various stages of development within a particular classroom and they should be allowed to progress at their own pace in order to maximise their learning.

"All children learn at their own rate. I feel we should take them where they are when they come to us and do our best to positively encourage them to do the best they can do through belief in them ...' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Children learn through collaboration with others. Children involved in co-operative learning situations learn better, develop more positive self-concepts, get along better with their peers and are more accepting of those who are different (Fiske, 1992). Children develop socially, emotionally and intellectually through interaction with others. Programmes which recognise the importance of developing positive peer-group relationships and providing opportunities for co-operative learning situations that engage children in conversation, challenge their

thinking and extend their ideas will be effective in maximising learning.

'Children need the experience of working and playing in a group in order to develop social skills- a basis for learning.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

Families play a significant role in the growth and development of the child (NAEYC, 1988; ECEC, 1991). Parents are the first teachers of their children and should continue to be involved in the educational process, even as their children enter formal schooling. Parents should be viewed as integral partners in the instructional process. They have nurtured and taught their children up to the first day of school. They will continue to teach their children, even as the school years go by. As partners in education, parents can provide powerful insight to the school with regards to their children's learning styles, interests and experiences.

'If the child's parents are interested they will compliment school activities and the child will benefit. Parents who show little interest often have children who take longer to achieve their targets. Support and approval are vital to a child.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

Children learn through play (CACE, 1967; Abbott, 1994). At one time or another, we have all heard the saying 'Children's play is their work'. And hard work it is. ***"Play is a central and necessary part of children's development"*** (Gammage and Little, 1994, p. 24). At any one time, in a play situation in nursery, reception and even year one, children playing in a group may be involved not only in collaborating, negotiating, choosing, organising, questioning, responding, explaining, but in many aspects of cognitive, physical and creative development.

Play provides a unique opportunity for children to experience concrete and symbolising activities that extend thought and provide meaning to the mysteries, curiosities and conundrums of the real world.

'...Our kindergarten is play-based. And young children learn through play. We still do academics, but it's in a play-based manner and the children are very comfortable with that and that's how young children learn best... through play.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

At a sand table, for example, where children appear, for all intents and purposes, to be playing, language development can be enhanced as opportunities for oral speech are encouraged and topic specific vocabulary is introduced, practised and reinforced. Thinking skills are enhanced through questioning, observing, testing and problem-solving. Social responsibility develops as the children interact with each other in a co-operative situation, involving sharing, compromising and teamwork. Physically, both fine and gross motor skills develop as the children, with and without utensils, manipulate, scoop, lift and pour the sand. Their learning may be further extended as they write about their experiences at the sand table: recalling, writing, reading and illustrating. All in all, a great deal of **work** is accomplished by any standards, but within the context of play.

It is evident that play which is both purposeful and enjoyable is an important component of early years programmes. ***"Too often play is perceived, by those remote from early years provision, as a frivolous, or low-level activity***" (Gammage and Little, 1994, p25). In fact, in almost no other area of the curriculum for early years programming is there such universal and common agreement as on the value of play. Froebel wrote of the importance of play over one hundred years ago.

More recently, Whitehead (1993, p.6) wrote "***[The] daily and often undervalued mix of play, language and social skills is the real foundation of cognitive development; its components are more truly described as 'basics' than the usually cited conventions of written language and mathematics notation."*** The conclusion of the Rumbold Committee (cited in Abbott, op cit., p 52) sums up the importance of play: ***"It has a fundamental role in early childhood education, supplying the foundation upon which learning is built."***

Assessment of young children should be 'authentic '(Willis, 1993). Authentic assessment involves engaging children in meaningful activities from the real world that require knowledge in use. It is on-going. It involves self-assessment. It reflects the process of learning. It should measure whether or not teachers have offered children opportunities for exploring, constructing and communicating meaning. It involves a partnership of child, parents and teacher. Portfolios, or profiles, can provide authentic evidence of learning that shows progress over time. The use of portfolio assessment often evolves naturally into child-led parent/teacher conferences. Most children are generally eager and delighted to present the portfolio contents to their parents and to explain their learning and understanding as they demonstrate, with work samples that show progress over time, the processes that often lead to comprehension of the curriculum. Parents who participate in this process for the first time are usually amazed, not only at the learning itself, but at the way their child articulates his/her own learning.

Teachers must make daily decisions that will affect the learning of the children in their classrooms. Only teachers, who are at the grass roots levels of the day-to-day school lives of their pupils, can recommend the appropriate intervention strategies that will meet the unique needs of each child. They will need assistance, especially for very young children, from parents, from involved agencies and from the children themselves in order to make the best possible decisions that will promote children's learning.

The majority of teachers involved in the survey were confident enough in their own judgement of children to list observation as the major tool in the assessment of their pupils (Appendix B, Table 9). One teacher, from Nottinghamshire, put it very succinctly. When asked to list the assessment tools used, this teacher responded ***'My eyes, my ears. Observation from me as a classrooom teacher.'*** Chapter 11 provides further discussion of appropriate assessment for very young children.

Researchers have provided educators with a view of pupils as "learners who are actively involved in building up a personal knowledge of the world around them through action, experience and reflection" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990). The Principles of Child Development highlighted in this chapter, along with many others, provide direction for teachers to support learning through a balanced emphasis on social, emotional, physical, creative, cognitive and moral development, beginning in the early years and continuing through primary school. As educators, we want children to enter school and begin a journey of lifelong learning. The challenge for teachers is to ensure that the ***'content of the curriculum is taught so as to take***

optimum advantage of the child's natural abilities, interests and enthusiasm for learning' (NAEYC, 1990) in order to maximise the overall progress of each pupil each year. Using the principles of child development as a guide, teachers can readily accept this challenge and plan a developmentally appropriate program that stimulates the children and encourages them to be actively involved in their learning journey, not as Montessori (1919, p 14) cautioned ***'like butterflies mounted on pins, the children are fastened each to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge which they have acquired'***, but, as Zorba (Kazantkazis, 1952) discovered, gradually and patiently being allowed to unfold their wings, "obeying the eternal rhythms".

A comment from an Albertan teacher sums up the importance of developmentally appropriate programming:

'When I taught first grade [year one], I thought it would be nice if [the children] could print their names, count to 10, etc. But as I've learned more about appropriate developmental practice, I realise the error of my ways! It is not the child's job to be ready for school; it is the school's job to be ready for the child. It is teachers who lack readiness skills. We need to know and understand the stages of child development and tailor our programmes to accommodate them.'

This comment leads to the focus of the next chapter, that of setting appropriate programme goals. These goals are most effective when they are based upon the realisation, by those who are developing educational programmes, that very young children have unique learning needs, and that, indeed, it is the responsibility of the schools to be 'ready' to meet those needs.

Chapter 10: Setting Programme Goals

'... good curriculum must be individually appropriate to the needs and interests of the children in a programme...it must be culturally salient and locally relevant and meaningful in the context of a specific community.' (NAEYC, 1991, p 23)

All early childhood programmes should be unique and reflect the needs and culture of the children and families that are being served. One of the essential elements of high quality, effective programmes is the establishment of goal statements that are aimed at meeting the unique needs of children in a particular programme (Rodger, 1994; Bertram and Pascal, 1995). Effective early childhood programmes increase individual differences; they do not diminish them. Once children enter a formal educational setting, their individuality must not be blended into 'assembly line outputs'; the educational setting must pursue diversity of outcome, not uniformity. Almost all the teachers interviewed addressed this very issue in one way or another. The following are illustrative of many of their comments:

'There can't be one global rule for everyone in the class. There have to be general guidelines, but you have to be flexible and understanding, too, because they come from such a wide variety of backgrounds and their needs are so different.' (teacher, Alberta)

'I'm very much for taking each child as an individual and working from where they're at. Some are more academically aware and socially aware than others so it's looking at each child as an individual.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

Two decades ago, Widlake and Bell (1973) suggested that a holistic approach to developing programmes would enable early years provision to match children's needs and learning styles with available resources and strategies. A great deal of the failure to learn to read,

they contended, was actually school-based and related to inappropriate programme goals that failed to take into account individual needs:

'The great majority of children who fail to learn to read adequately have no specific learning disability; if their capacity to learn had been matched to appropriate tasks at the right time they would not have failed.' (Widlake and Bell, 1973, p 128).

The emphasis on meeting individual needs through setting appropriate programme goals continues today. Educators do not generally dispute the argument that optimal learning can best be fostered by recognising and attending to individual differences, but having to develop programmes that will meet the 'unique' needs of each child often instils fear into the hearts of the teachers and providers. Whilst individualisation of instruction will certainly address the needs of each child, it ***'does not necessarily imply one-to-one-instruction, except for possible short periods of time, but rather planning and providing activities and programmes appropriate for meeting each child's individual needs'*** (Hayden, 1978, p. 42). Within the eclectic make-up of a particular class or programme, there are often similar activities and strategies that will meet the diverse needs of individuals.

Programme goals that are rooted in developmentally appropriate practice are widely accepted by educators and researchers in the early years (Alberta Education, 1988b; NAEYC, 1988; NAEYC, 1990; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1992; Willis, 1993; Sylva, 1993; Ball, 1994; Gammage and Little, 1994; Little, 1995). They find support for their philosophy in the work and writings of such early promoters of developmentally appropriate practice (although not designated as such- these words appear to have come into common

usage following the wide dissemination of NAEYC material from the 1980s to the present) as Robinson, Locke, Rousseau, Abbott, Bushnell, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, Isaacs and Piaget (see Chapter 1, Section I). Schweinhart and Hohmann (1993, p.16) have defined a developmentally appropriate early childhood classroom as one which is

> '... ***arranged to support children's active learning and use a variety of multicultural and non-sexist materials. Teachers observe and respond to each child's unique blend of physical, social, emotional and intellectual abilities and interests. They often talk with children, ask them thought-provoking questions and allow them to learn from their mistakes. They help children develop self-esteem and self-control, while avoiding undue stress. They work in partnership with parents, assessing children's activities through both their observations and those of parents.'***

However, some educators and policy makers fear that developmentally appropriate programmes are unstructured, 'free-for-all' **play** programmes (Chapter 9 of this section discusses the learning that takes place during children's 'play') that do not result in any learning that can be measured by the 'tried and true' standardised tests. But Schweinhart and Hohmann (op cit. p. 16) argue that developmentally appropriate practice can, if needs be, show success on standardised achievement tests. In addition, they say, developmentally appropriate programmes have proved to help ' ***'at-risk' pupils improve their school achievement and literacy skills***'.

Schweinhart and Hohmann contrast the High/Scope curriculum with typical early years programmes as one which allows the child maximum participation as a 'self-initiating active learner' and which

places the 'primary emphasis on problem-solving and independent thinking'. Typical programmes, they argue, are more teacher-directed and concentrate on social development and relationships. The High/Scope curriculum has evolved over the past two decades into a child-centred, developmentally appropriate programme that addresses the diversity of background, strengths and interests of the children, provides appropriate and effective materials and strategies for staff, and results in a cost-effective investment to parents, community and society in terms of enhancing the character, self-esteem and educational achievement of the children.

Schweinhart and Hohmann conclude that the final objectives of both the High/Scope curriculum and other programmes based on developmentally appropriate practice are to ***'realise nothing more that the full potential inherent in each individual... [and to] recognise in each individual nothing less than the total forces that create understanding, learning and development.'*** How can anyone (including politicians) ask for anything more from children and the practitioners who endeavour to guide their path to exploring, constructing and communicating meaning in the social, emotional, economical and life possibilities of today's world?

In setting appropriate programme goals, the NAEYC (1988, p 69) states that curriculum goals must be '***designed to develop children's knowledge and skills***' in all areas of social, emotional, intellectual and physical growth and ***'to establish [in children] a foundation for lifelong learning', 'to develop children's self-esteem, sense of competence and positive feelings towards learning'*** and, finally, to

view each child ***'as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth'***. Teaching strategies to meet those goals should focus on an integrated approach that is child-centred, allowing for active involvement with the environment, peers, staff and volunteers, encouraging both individual and co-operative work and play with ***'learning materials and activities that are concrete, real and relevant to children's lives'*** (p 71).

The NAEYC (op cit. p 64) statement parallels that of High/Scope- that is the planning challenge for practitioners is to ***'ensure that the content of the curriculum is taught so as to take optimum advantage of the child's natural abilities, interests, and enthusiasm for learning'.*** The most effective programmes for young children ensure that the curriculum goals are developed around the unique and individual needs of children (Allen et al, 1991).

Children's learning must be purposeful and meaningful. Indeed, the younger the children, the more meaningful their learning must be, not just in the context of perceived future learning, but on the very day that they learn it (Willis, 1993, p. 1). It is the extent to which meaning is accessed that will ensure the success of an appropriate early years programme. An effective early childhood curriculum must sustain a child's sense of wonder and appetite for exploration (Eisner, 1993)- both important elements in the search, by very young children, for concrete meaning in an often abstract world. It is the children's wonder and curiosity that will seek exploration, but it will be promoted by the curriculum and guidance of the teachers which ensure opportunities for

exploring, constructing and communicating meaning, and which provide appropriate materials and feedback.

Children will experience more success if they are given opportunities to develop some responsibility for their own learning, to take risks without failure being the consequence and to be given feedback that is meaningful and provides a base for continued learning. Children who are able to define, at least to some extent, their own educational agendas and to frame their own purposes will, at the same time, be developing the ability to define ways to achieve, a skill that will bring them closer to the ideal of becoming 'architects of their own education' (Eisner, 1993) in later school years. Whilst developing independence and individuality, early childhood programmes must also allow opportunities for children to work together in small groups, thereby encouraging co-operation, sharing of ideas and materials and the development of language and communication skills.

In the pursuit of intrinsic motivation- that is, that children must find purpose in doing what they are offered the opportunities to do- early childhood programmes must not be undermined by placing unnecessary emphasis on evaluation and assessment. Yet, careful assessment is an essential element of early years programmes, particularly when the goal is to foster optimal learning. Chapter 11 will examine the need for appropriate and authentic assessment in the early years.

Chapter 11: Appropriate Assessment

'...record-keeping, observing, assessing, evaluation and reporting are essential, and every institution should develop a system for it.' (DES, 1990, p 17)

With all children, particularly with very young children, it is important to make the distinction between assessment and evaluation. **Assessment** involves keeping track of the child's progress and development. **Evaluation** examines what the programme has offered, what is currently being offered and what the child will be offered next (Bartholomew and Bruce, 1993). The most important aspect of assessment and evaluation lies in linking the two together to ensure that the children are given opportunities to develop and learn to their maximum potential.

The NAEYC defines assessment as the ***"process of observing, recording and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it, as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child"*** (Hills, 1992,p. 43). Inherent in this definition is the role of assessment and its relevance to children's learning.

1. APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT HELPS TO ENSURE THAT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN ARE MET. Each child has unique interests, strengths and differences and a unique personality and learning style. Consequently, the learning needs of each child will differ to some degree.

2. APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT IMPROVES CHOICES FOR CURRICULUM CONTENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE. What we are especially interested in is using assessment

to help children along their learning journey, to recognise and build on existing strengths and to develop strategies to overcome weaknesses. (Alberta Education, 1990)

3. APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT HELPS TEACHERS COLLABORATE WITH PARENTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHILDREN. A positive partnership between parents and teachers can have a powerful and constructive effect on children's learning. Most parents keep track, in one way or another, of their children's development from birth. In fact, much of the information we have about child development comes from parents who, in the course of their professional research or interests, have observed, tracked and documented their children's progress. Once children enter nursery school or reception classes, parents eagerly await news of progress in these new situations.

4. APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT DEMONSTRATES THAT EDUCATION IS FULFILLING ITS MISSION TO CHILDREN, COMMUNITIES AND THE LARGER SOCIETY.

In recent years, the term "authentic assessment" has been widely adopted in both Canada and the United States as educators endeavour to assess what they value in teaching. Three types of assessment generally used by teachers can be classed as authentic. **Anecdotal notes** are based on observing children and can be recorded in several different formats. **Work samples** are actual artifacts of the children's work, photocopied examples, photographs, and audio or video tapes. **Authentic tests** are generally teacher-made and curriculum integrated. A fourth type of assessment is standardised tests. These commercially produced, decontextualised tests are, more often than not, multiple

choice. Contrived or standardised tests may be easily invalidated by the particular circumstances of a child on the test day or by the constraints of the construction of the test. These tests are geared to the mythical 'average' child, and provide little valid information for real children. Since I am a firm opponent of the use of standardised tests in the assessment of young children's learning, I shall concentrate only on those types of assessment which are, in my mind, most beneficial in promoting learning in the early years.

Assessment is a necessary part of schooling. But educators need not subject children to developmentally inappropriate assessment tools when strategies are available that provide information on what children know and can do and are directly related to learning that takes place in the classroom. Two assessment practices, in particular, can be used to more effectively and authentically reflect the learning of very young children. Both portfolio assessment and observation resulting in a narrative record encompass many of the aspects of authentic assessment and, in fact, complement each other. The survey teachers voiced strong preferences (Appendix B, Table 9) for the use of observation and locally -made assessment checklists for assessing the progress of children in the early years (Mid Glamorgan teachers particularly relied on the Mid Glamorgan Profile Foundation- a checklist of readiness skills developed by teachers and educators from the Mid Glamorgan LEA). Their belief in the value of these methods is apparent in some of their responses:

'Professional judgement based on observation of the child in social situations, attitudes and interest in books, linguistic capabilities.' (teacher, Nottinghamshire)

'Mainly assessment involves observation and listening.' (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

[I use] 'observation of how a child functions during a variety of activities. I have been teaching for many years so I have a long checklist.' (teacher, Alberta)

A description of the important elements of portfolio assessment and observation follows.

Portfolio Assessment

Whether assessment is called authentic, appropriate or curriculum-integrated, it is clear that the move is towards a more formative method of assessing children's progress in learning- "***that is, the use of collected data to assist in the improvement of performance through self-evaluation.***" (Valeri-Gold et al., 1992, p. 298). The **consistent** use of portfolio assessment as an authentic alternative to traditional classroom assessment practices is becoming widespread, both in Canada and the United States. The Belgian school, *Ecole Reine Astrid,* described in Chapter 2, Section I, incorporates portfolio assessment as a means of ensuring continuity in the children's learning and ensuring a smooth transition from one level to the next. In Britain, teachers, not only in infant and primary schools, but in nursery schools, as well, are experiencing the benefits of adopting a portfolio style of assessment.

Portfolio assessment must be meaningful to children's learning and communicate essential information to stakeholders. Combining and incorporating a variety of strategies into the assessment structure of portfolios will provide a fairly accurate portrait of children's learning. These include observation of the children as they work in groups and individually; small and large group discussions centred around a particular theme or topic of study; interviews with the children about

work in progress or completed projects; work samples showing growth over time, including initial and final drafts; anecdotal records highlighting learning; photographs of projects or work-in-action; video and/or audio tapes of children reading or interacting with their peers during co-operative learning activities. Certainly for very young children, these strategies will be the most valuable in terms of assessing their development and learning and in providing appropriate assessment information to parents, teachers, administrators and to the children themselves.

Portfolio assessment should be used consistently on a year-long basis to evaluate both product **and** process. Input from the child, teacher and parent will aid in setting goals that will encourage lifelong learning. Goals that are established with input from all the stakeholders in the child's education will be more meaningful and more easily attained. Linking the assessment needs of the pupils, the teachers and the parents is important. The pupils need to have their strengths identified and to fully understand their educational needs. The teachers use the identification of the pupils' strengths and needs to assist them in guiding future learning through planning for appropriate instruction and strategies. Parents are given portfolio information to help them monitor the progress of their children and identify areas where home assistance could be of value.

Parents can contribute valuable information, as well, by providing feedback on the interests and attitudes of their children. Most parents have been observing their children daily from birth and will have a wealth of information, particularly useful to teachers of children under

five, about developmental milestones and developmental strengths and weaknesses and about effective learning strategies and about peer relationships.

The role of the children in portfolio assessment is paramount. Not only are they the subject of the assessment, but they are the sources of assessment information. They become observers and critics of their own thinking processes and progress and, in the end, are the beneficiaries of the way in which all the information they have provided is used. During the actual conference, child, teacher and parent(s) discuss the learning that is apparent from the portfolio contents. All three work together to set goals for future learning. This ensures that all stakeholders are aware of the learning goals and the responsibility each plays in reaching those goals. Since learning is seen as a co-operative effort, parents seemed to have a clearer vision of their child's education and valued the opportunity to examine authentic work, receive positive feedback and celebrate their child's learning.

Graves and Sunstein (1992) write that "As educators, we are mere infants in the use of portfolios". True, for many educators, but artists have relied upon portfolios for years to represent the depth and range of their best and most current work. For the artist, as for the pupil, the contents of a portfolio are defined by the purpose. It is clear that there is no such thing as **the** portfolio. A portfolio must suit the purpose for which it is designed, and purposes for portfolios could become different for the teacher, team or division that may be using them.

Observation

Since teacher reflection and pupil self-reflection are a vital part of portfolio assessment, observation becomes intertwined with this type of assessment as the teacher must continually observe actions and interactions within the learning groups in order to reflect upon the portfolio contents. Reflection on anecdotal notes taken during observation of process assists in assessing learning. Observing children for the purpose of developing anecdotal records takes practice. The more one does, the better one becomes. It is important to develop clarity of purpose and to constantly be aware of looking at the positive aspects of a child's progress- at what the child **can** do. For teachers committed to assessment through observation and anecdotal recording, it seems that the more they look, the more they see; the more they see, the more they understand what is going on, not only with individuals, but with the class as a whole (Baskwill and Whitman, 1988). Many things may go unnoticed when they are not recorded as they happen. As parents live through the excitement of their baby's first tooth, first steps and first words, so teachers live through the excitement of the many milestones that children reach at school.

Incidents -milestones, really- that may be in jeopardy of being undated, forgotten or under-rated in terms of their importance in the learning journeys of children can be saved and incorporated into the assessment process. The teacher's recognition of the importance of recording such achievements provides the evidence of progress that can not only be shared with parents but used as stepping stones to encourage further developments in children's learning.

Observation techniques must be developed and practised by teachers and adapted to suit the needs of the children and the staff. There are three stages to effective observation of children's learning (Little, 1995, from a workshop presented to teachers in Cheshire):

1. **THE BEGINNING:** Although there may be a danger in deciding in advance precisely what will be observed and recorded, some sense of purpose should be established. Anecdotal records that result from observations should be seen as living documents that become a '***...continuous dialogue between long-term plans and the individual child's development and learning day by day and week by week.***' (Bartholomew and Bruce, 1993, p. 43) A key decision will be the method by which the observations are recorded and will be guided by the teacher's own preferences. Teachers use a variety of techniques to record observations and the accessibility of computer technology has proved very useful to those who are fortunate enough to have computers available and the inclination to work with them.

2. THE MIDDLE: Finding the recording strategy that best suits the particular teacher may take some time, trying out several different methods until one that is compatible with the teacher's style and needs, the needs of the children and the classroom and school organisation. Observation techniques which are supportive of learning, incorporate the following:

1. Observing and recording occurs regularly as part of the classroom routine.

2. Observing the class in a holistic way ensures a general sense of what is occurring. There may be children who require immediate attention

or intervention and it is important to note what attracted the attention of the teacher, any interaction with the children and responses to that interaction.

3. Recording observations of **every child** in the class. Often the children who are happily independent fade into the background and little observation of their behaviour is noted.

4. Varying the settings and times of the observations. For example, the physical set-ups of the gymnasium and the classroom, the library and the playground will naturally promote different behaviours.

5. Recording behaviours as close to the time of observation as possible. Whilst this may often seem impossible, it ensures accuracy. Memories can be easily tapped at the end of the day, but notes often remind one of the specifics of incidents.

6. Planning some time, periodically, to talk to each child about the observations. Even very young children should be offered opportunities to respond and provide their own observations of themselves. They need to know that assessment is the key to planning their on-going learning.

8. Updating observations regularly and in order to inform parents of their children's development and learning.

3. THE END: There is not much use in gathering assessment information unless it will be used to promote children's learning. Curriculum planning will benefit from the information collected through observation. It will allow teachers to plan curriculum for the whole class, as well as developing specific programmes based on the observed needs of individuals. Observation allows teachers to watch children in action and pinpoint areas of high interest to encourage, develop and extend. Since observation is an ongoing part of the daily programme, teachers are able to immediately capitalise on the children's curiosity about particular areas of interest. Assessing the children by observing them actively engaged in work and play allows

teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of current programming strategies and may lead to programme changes.

Ultimately it is the teachers who have responsibility for developing programmes that will meet the goals and objectives prescribed by governments. In addition to programme development, teachers must make daily decisions that will affect the learning of the children in their classrooms. In reality, ***"School is a context in which evaluation is pervasive, continuous and systematic***" (Burns, 1982, p. 202) and most children have little choice in the process of assessment of their learning. As a result, they are unable to avoid situations where they may be anxious about their success or failure, leaving teachers with the responsibility to make accurate, authentic and detailed observations that demonstrate growth over time. Teachers, who are at the grass roots levels of the day-to-day school lives of their pupils, can recommend appropriate learning strategies that will meet the unique needs of each child. They will need assistance, especially for very young children, from parents, from involved agencies and from the children themselves, since they cannot possibly be expected to know **all** there is to know about a particular child. Still, it falls, in the end, to the teacher to make the best possible decision based on the evidence of recorded observations and, when appropriate, the portfolio contents.

Table 9 (Appendix B) shows the strong emphasis that the teachers in the study place on observation and locally made assessment tools. The majority of the teachers felt very comfortable in using their own professional judgement and observational skills in order to assess the entry skills of the children and the progress that they made in the

programmes. Next to observation, teachers noted that they made use of locally developed assessment tools such as the Mid Glamorgan Profile and the Nottinghamshire 'All About Me'. Often, these were supplemented with teacher-made checklists, portfolio assessment and information gathered from parents. It is clear that, for the most part, these early years teachers support the use of appropriate assessment as a necessary component of a quality early years programme.

Assessment, evaluation and programme planning belong in the hands of the teachers who support, encourage and challenge the children in their learning journey. Chapter 12 discusses the importance of the theoretical aspects of teacher education and training that provide teachers with the vital knowledge they need in order to make appropriate decisions in planning programmes and assessing the learning of young children.

Chapter 12: Teacher Education

'...the most crucial factor at the heart of high quality learning is high quality teaching.' (Bolton, 1992)

Fullan (1993) suggests that teacher education is 'society's missed opportunity'. The changes, discussed in previous chapters, in the roles of parents and institutions reflect the changes of society as a whole. These inevitable changes affect the nature and quality of teacher education. Fullan (op cit., p. 104) further comments that ***"... a high quality teaching force- always learning- is the sine qua non of coping with dynamic complexity, i.e., of helping to produce citizens who can manage their lives and relate to those around them in a continually changing world. There are no substitutes to having better teachers."*** Better teachers can only meet the changing and diverse needs of young children and their families if they, too, are able to access appropriate education and training.

Currently, it is the degree of emphasis on theory and practice in teacher education that continues to be a subject of debate. Policy makers in many countries (England, for example) appear willing to reduce the theoretical component and place more emphasis on the practical component of field experience. But practice is no substitute for theory, nor theory for practice. This chapter will examine the balance between theory and practice and the elements that are most often cited as crucial to the education and training of effective teachers.

Teacher education and training remains one of the vital components in the framework of effective educational provision, and is especially important in the early years. The individuality of young children, their

unique learning needs and the vast developmental differences in their growth patterns, coupled with the wide variety in the nature of their home lives and community environments point to the need for teachers to have a solid theoretical background in child development, child psychology, curriculum and instruction, social issues and interpersonal relationships. In addition to the theoretical background, practice in the classroom remains a significant component of teacher education.

Society, for the most part, has relied for centuries on the expertise of teachers to provide children with basic learning tools and to challenge young and developing minds in preparation for responsible and contributory entry into an adult world. Yet, at the very hint of dissatisfaction with the educational system due to changes in traditional teaching methods based on educational research or to perceived failure in relationship to assessment outcomes of children in other countries, teachers are first and foremost to be blamed (Friesen, 1987). The most vocal voices raised against the teaching profession are often those of politicians, anxious to justify cuts to the funding of teacher education with the questionable theory that teachers can be adequately "trained" in the classroom and have little need for the developmental, philosophical and methodological theory provided in university or college programmes.

Of course, field experience is necessary in initial teacher education, but it constitutes only one component of teacher qualifications. In a recent British national survey (Blenkin and Yue, 1994) it was shown that Heads of Early Years Colleges consistently ranked knowledge of child development as the prime feature of influence in the professional

development of practitioners. Interestingly, heads of schools ranked it similarly. Even more interesting is the fact that some governments are beginning to put less emphasis on the theory of teacher education and demand longer practice in schools. It is important for early years teachers that their education focusses not only on practice but on theory and that it

> ***"...includes supervised field experience with [young children] and required coursework in child development and how children learn, in integrated curriculum and instructional strategies, and in communication with families"*** (NAEYC, 1988, p. 79).

Further support for the importance of theory in initial teacher education is offered by Katz (1984, p27) who suggests that ***"... the application of advanced knowledge to one's work, the use of judgement based on that advanced knowledge and the adoption of standards of performance below which no professional's performance may be allowed to fall"*** are indicators of the teacher as a professional. Katz goes on to clarify that advanced knowledge refers to knowledge that is derived from research in the fields of developmental psychology, child development and other areas of research related to education. Judgement, she continues, is the ability to ***"diagnose, analyse events, weigh alternative courses of action, estimate potential long term consequences of momentary actions and decisions and other information processing in which advanced knowledge comes into play"*** and standards of performance are indicative that teachers as professionals are ***"committed to performing at the same high standards whether they are in the mood or not...."*** (Katz, 1984, p 27). As I noted in Chapter 11, the teachers in this study often relied on their judgement and

observational skills to assess children. The degree to which they relied upon these skills, learned, presumably, not only through experience, but through pre-service education, appears to indicate the comfort they feel with this type of assessment.

More recently, although in agreement with Katz' broader statements, Siraj-Blatchford (1993, p. 23) is more specific and suggests that extensive research on child development indicates that early years teachers should be competent in the following areas:

- Knowledge and understanding of children's linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development
- Curriculum theory, development and evaluation
- Highly developed observational, interactional and communicative skills
- Professional ethics and child advocacy

The above competencies parallel, for the most part, those suggested by the NAEYC (1988, op cit.). These can provide the base for a broad and comprehensive theoretical component of teacher education.

The ability to plan and present effective, high quality early years programmes is irrevocably linked both to initial teacher education and to continuing professional development. It is clearly impossible to effectively teach young children without the theoretical perspectives on child development and learning that are provided in the coursework for initial teacher education. No one theory can explain the complexities that exist in the ways that children learn. Their individuality and

differential growth rates preclude the generalisation of one theory to explain all behaviour and learning. Only by examining and discussing the various theories put forth by researchers and educationists over the years will prospective teachers be able to make sense of the diversity in children's learning. Teachers need a strong theoretical background in order to recognise and understand the differences in each child's rate of growth in linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

Whilst the public often views the core of teacher preparation to be knowledge of subject area, there is so much more that is crucial in teacher education, particularly for primary years, than subject specialisation and expertise. Notwithstanding the need to be knowledgeable about specific curricular areas, courses in child development, developmental psychology, sociology, family and community resources, planning, assessment, and interpersonal relationships are vital. A Welsh teacher emphasises this need:

'I think [teachers] need a very, very sound training as far as child development is concerned. I think they also need more ... social training because we meet our parents every day. That's the nature of the job. And ... very often it's what you say and how you interact with the mum or carer that has a knock on effect with the child. I think [teachers] need to have far more people skills than perhaps we're giving them now.'

Once teachers have a clear understanding of child development, further courses in higher education need to focus on the theory behind curriculum development and evaluation. Subject expertise will develop as befits a professional who is committed to doing the best possible job, once a teaching placement has been secured and the

programme of studies (or curriculum) for that particular placement is known.

There are varying routes, in Europe and North America, to certification for teachers in early years programmes, including those in nurseries. Canada and Britain also offer different opportunities for student teachers to receive certification. A brief description of teacher training and education in these two countries follows.

Canada

There are fifty faculties of education in universities across Canada (Fullan, 1991). For the most part, the Bachelor of Education degree awarded by these faculties is comprised of three components:

- General education studies in liberal arts and science are generally done outside the faculty of college of education. This component usually spans one or two years during which time, the student chooses from a variety of courses that may lead to a major area of expertise in teacher education.

- Methods and foundations courses are usually completed within the faculty of education. These courses are specific to teacher education and, for early years teachers, may include, amongst others, mandated or optional courses in such areas as child development, social issues, interpersonal relations, curriculum and instructional strategies, including assessment, or psychology of atypical children.

- Finally, field experience in the classroom is an essential

component of teacher education in Canadian universities, but does not override the necessary theoretical component.

Canadian universities, in 1996, still have the autonomy to establish the requirements of the Bachelor of Education degree and most offer similar programmes. However, as provincial governments are attempting to eradicate deficits, universities are suffering cuts just as regional school boards are. For example, as recently as 1990, Alberta Education stated their intent to ***"...support and empower teachers to meet the diverse and changing needs of [pupils] and to improve [pupil] results***" (Alberta Education, 1990c, p. 22). The document went on to stress that teacher requirements should "reflect the most current knowledge about effective teaching practices" and that initial training and continuing professional development should ensure that teachers adapt their practices to meet the needs of individual children, including the accessing of professional expertise in the community, that school boards involve the community and business sectors in pupil learning and that universities enhance their teacher preparation courses and professional development courses. Three years later, a change in government signalled the advent of massive cuts in education which directly affected the funding available to universities for education courses, resulting in a down-sizing of education faculties and a reduction in the courses offered to prospective teachers. Further cuts to school boards resulted in large reductions in professional development funds for practising teachers and in the availability of system-wide personnel that had previously been responsible for arranging and conducting professional development activities.

In addition to the cuts in higher education which have the distinct possibility of affecting teacher education and training, the Alberta Government has recently awarded B.Ed. degree-granting status to two colleges in Alberta. Historically, colleges in Alberta maintained a distinct profile from universities, since they focused their attention on training students for technical and vocational careers. Colleges granted diplomas and certificates of achievement, but the awarding of degrees remained within the halls of the universities. The response, by the teachers of Alberta, to the government's decision is clearly an apprehension of the deprofessionalisation of teaching. Since universities currently graduate more teachers than can find positions with school boards, the government's decision is surely not to educate more teachers. Rather, the apparent motive seems to be the reduction in costs of awarding degrees from colleges as opposed to those from universities. Not only will it be cheaper to educate and train teachers in colleges, but it is fairly certain that these graduates '...won't have to be paid as much, making lower wage policies easier to implement' (ATA News, 1996 03 12, p 4).

Currently, only two colleges in Alberta have been awarded degree-granting status. If the experience of the United States in granting degree status to a proliferation of institutions is an indication of future direction, the Alberta government may look forward to justifiable, public concerns about a lack of standards, a drop in public confidence and the probability of a demand for competency-based licensing (ATA News, op cit.). Colleges are meant to provide short-term education and train as many people as possible to enter the workforce. Since teachers prepare the future citizens and decision-makers of the world, they must

be given access to the solid and much-needed grounding in education that is provided by the universities.

Britain

'Britain seems to have the largest number of diverse and confused routes to qualified teacher status, but (unlike many countries) fails to provide a clear and open route to support staff (nursery nurses and aides) to progress to the status of trained early years teacher.' (Ball, op cit., p29) Recently, the British government has increased the practical component of teacher education and increased the requirements for the number of hours of 'taught' courses relating to curriculum subject areas (Francis, 1996). The result of this is the theoretical component which, in fact, allows teachers to make sense of the practical components - the 'why' of the 'what'- has become largely redundant. Such courses as psychology, sociology and history of education have been virtually deleted from initial teacher education courses.

Currently, prospective teachers in England and Wales must obtain an initial degree and then study for another year in a PGCE (Post Graduate Course in Education) course. This route has traditionally been taken by those destined to teach in secondary schools and is generally regarded by universities as 'inappropriately short' (Gammage, 1996). Early years and primary teachers take a somewhat different route, obtaining a four-year BEd degree. Current deliberations by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) are aimed at reducing the required time for the BEd to three years.

The impact of an imbalance between theory and practice has been previously discussed in this chapter. Not only will teachers lose opportunities to develop into reflective practitioners with the significant reduction in the theoretical components of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), but children will miss out on the benefit of the expertise and knowledge that teachers gain through courses focusing on the psychology and sociology of child development and on the history of education.

For the most part, early years teachers in many countries of the world (for example, Britain, Canada, USA, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden) are now (1995) trained to full (bachelor's) degree level and the awarding body is of college or university status. Despite this, the status and 'tradable' quality of a BEd or BA in education may not be perceived by the general public in some countries as equal to that of a BSc degree in science, or a general degree in arts. Generally speaking, however, and especially with reference to children under about five years of age, the younger the child being taught, the shorter the training will have been. Hand in hand with this shorter training often goes lower status and lower remuneration. The main findings of a recent report (Pederson and Bennett, 1994) from the European Trade Union Committee for Education (Educe) indicate that

"teacher education must reflect and enhance the high status of teaching as a profession, and must be firmly based at university level. This not only reflects the important status of teacher education, but makes possible the wide ranging involvement with a number of disciplines which teacher education requires, as well as the contact with educational and other research, work, which is needed to underpin the essential school-based components of teacher education courses. Also, a balanced teacher education programmes must contain four elements-

subject study; educational science, including pedagogy; methodology and didactics, and practice."

Notwithstanding the differences between pre-primary, primary, secondary and post secondary education, the Report goes on to stress that ***"... the basic principles underlying teachers' professional needs remain the same. All teachers must be regarded as members of one high status profession."***

Initial training of early childhood teachers is important, but equally so, the need for continuing professional development is recognised by educationists throughout the world (NAEYC, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Levine, 1991; Siraj-Blatchford, 1993; Little and Meighan, 1995; Gammage, 1995a; Day, 1995) as an important component in teacher education. ***'There is an urgent need for a programme if in-service training for pre-school staff which focuses on the positive role they can play in helping children learn'*** (Munn, in press). Continuing professional development opportunities can ensure that curriculum revisions and research innovations are incorporated into early childhood programme goals and objectives. In addition, continuing professional development will, in all likelihood, increase teachers' competence, confidence and creativity' (NAEYC, 1988, p. 79).

As well as professional readings, school visits and system in-service aimed at curriculum development, it is important that teachers understand ***'the interrelationship between theory and practice and acquire investigative attitudes and skills'*** (Lauriala and Syrjala, 1995, p 109). Whilst the traditional professional development activities mentioned above are certainly valuable, effective change in the

classroom is more likely to occur through reflective practice, that is, observation, reflection and collaborative discussion with colleagues. ***'The quality of pre-school provision- and particularly the degree of reflective practice among staff- is crucial for maximising literacy and numeracy'*** (Munn, in press). The ETUCE Report (op cit.) stresses that '***initial teacher education, induction and on-going forms of teacher education are essential for the professional development of the teacher in a rapidly changing educational and social context. The different phases of teacher education should as far as possible be planned as part of a continuous process.'***

'Greater initial and [continuing] in-service training of early years educators' (David, 1992, p.12) will ensure an understanding of continuity and progression in early learning, an understanding of the need for integrated community, educational and health services and an understanding of how to access and use them effectively. Out of such understandings, teachers come to realise the importance of establishing partnerships in learning. The next chapter continues the discussion that was begun in Section II, Chapter 6, relating to the importance of educational partnerships and offers some examples of partnerships that are designed to enhance opportunities for 'at risk' children and to promote effective learning in early childhood.

Chapter 13: Effective Partnerships in Learning

'Early childhood education's commitment to families is strengthened through the partnership process' (Swick, 1992).

The family's commitment during the early childhood years is no less important than their continuing involvement in their children's learning. Section II, Chapter 6 discussed partnerships in learning. It examined both the influence of parents on language development and self-esteem and the establishment of effective partnerships amongst schools, families, communities and businesses. This chapter will focus on various forms of partnerships that are designed to meet the changing needs of children and their families.

A common theme throughout this thesis has been the focus on change- the one thing in life that is certain and continual. Our society has changed and these changes are reflected in our school systems. Societal and technological developments have affected, to some extent, **how** children learn, and to a larger extent, **what** children learn. Day to day classroom operations and security are very different from that of even ten years ago. A Chinese saying offers this advice: 'One is able and wise who understands the signs of the times.' Clearly, education is heeding those signs and entering, in many cases, into partnerships where shared decision-making has become paramount.

Schools and families have a common need to form working partnerships that establish goals and priorities that are in the best interests of the children and the other stakeholders. Many of the teachers who responded to the survey highlighted the need for 'more parent involvement' and 'partnerships' (Appendix B, Table 13). Some of the comments aimed specifically at this issue included the following:

'Teaching staff and parents must work as a partnership to ensure that each child reaches his/her full potential. Support from outside agencies [is also needed].' (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'Involvement of parents in the classroom and improving parent education seem to go hand in hand. To deal with this, my present situation has created a pilot project with an advisory committee that involves two parents as well as two representatives from the school board, Department of Education and the university. The two parents call regular meetings of the parents for the purpose of discussion and clarification of ideas and things happening 'in the classroom'.' (teacher, New Brunswick)

A partnership merger can foster positive growth in the children, the schools and the families. Research (Widlake and MacLeod, 1984; Powell, 1989; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Strahan, 1994) shows that a strong parent/school partnership promotes learning and increases self-esteem in children and families. Fullan (1991, p. 228), citing other educationists, suggests that

'There is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement, even after the [pupil's] ability and family socio-economic status is taken into account. [Pupils] gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasize schooling, let their children know they do and do so continually over the years.'

Partnerships, whilst retaining the flexibility to meet the unique needs of the children and families within a particular school, must recognise that ***'a framework for carrying out the process is essential. The following elements need close scrutiny: teacher and parent contexts, role understandings and an appreciation of the partnership process itself'*** (Swick, 1992, p 2). Within the uniqueness of each partnership, other essential elements such as conducting a needs assessment, setting goals based on identified needs, developing strategies for implementing the goals and monitoring and evaluating the partnership on an on-going basis will ensure a successful relationship.

Early childhood education's commitment to family involvement has been a unique feature for many years. Although to a lesser extent than many of the programmes today, even Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori encouraged parents to be involved in their children's learning. Over the years, the societal changes in family structure and in attitudes towards learning have been reflected in educational provision, particularly in the early years, with an increased emphasis on the quality of parent involvement. But two levels of partnership still exist. On the one hand, many parents are eager to participate in decision-making, curriculum development and day to day activities in early years programmes. On the other hand are the parents who need encouragement from the school and community to recognise that their input is valuable, not only to the children, but to the structure and relationships within the family.

MacPherson (1993) identifies two problems that may arise in setting up pro-active and positive policies for effective parent/school

partnerships. First, she suggests that parents and educational professionals may have different perceptions of the nature and extent of parent involvement. Educators cited in a previous chapter of this thesis (Chapter 6 in Section II, Day et al., 1990) stress that parents should be involved as integral partners in the decision-making process of the schools and should not be accepted into schools only in the role of classroom assistants. MacPherson (1993, p 66) also emphasises an ***"equal partnership and parents' legal rights and entitlement to information and participation"***. Whilst this is an ideal situation in parent/school partnerships, it does not necessarily exist, in reality, in many schools.

MacPherson's second point focuses on the tension that may arise as a result of the role and skills of the professional in the partnership. She suggests that educators must become more flexible in dealing with the differing and unique needs of families. This suggests the development of new skills that will enable educators not only to share the power of educational decision-making with parents in order to best serve the needs of the child, but to accept, unconditionally, standards and values which may be in direct opposition to their own. With respect to this point, the role of continuing professional development is significant in the careers of teachers, since new situations may suggest further education, for example, in the areas of interpersonal relationships, effective communication or social issues.

A third point appears to emerge from the previous two: that is, the important differences between the roles of the parents and the educators. Parents often try to adopt the simultaneous teaching roles of

the home and the school, forgetting the emotional investment and partiality they have for their own child. This issue has been discussed in Chapter 6 of Section II of this thesis. Often, when situations such as this arise, educators may act as facilitators, encouraging parents to step back and assess their roles. At the same time, parents need to be encouraged to continue as active participants in the education of their children, but in such a way, that additional stress is not placed on familial relationships that may be facing stress from other factors. Effective partnerships will recognise differences and commonalities, and place value on both in order that 'meaningful and non-threatening dialogue can begin to take place' (MacPherson, 1993, p 67) so that problems can be solved and decisions can be made in the best interests of the child.

On a more practical note, schools can no longer ignore what parents think about and want in their children's education. Many governments are offering parents a choice with, for example, the grant maintained schools in England and the similar charter schools in Alberta, to leave the traditional public school systems and administer their own schools. With this 'opting out' goes the financial backing that established schools need to survive. Effective partnerships may reduce the incidence of parents 'opting out' and increase opportunities to provide a meaningful education that is in the best interests of children and financially accessible to all children.

Home and school partnerships have existed for many years in a variety of models, but effective partnerships that combine the previously mentioned elements of framework development and evaluation and

understanding of the partnership process may be further strengthened by inviting additional partners to join. The community and the business sector have much to offer to partnerships. Their involvement, within the established framework of identified needs of a particular school community, will often increase opportunities for developing relationships and multicultural understandings, for seeking alternate funding sources in order to provide appropriate programming and resources, and for more creative problem-solving approaches. Several examples of effective partnerships in Canada and Britain illustrate how families, schools, businesses and community services can work together to provide high quality programmes for children in their early years of learning.

Canada

Adding the community as a partner in education brings to the partnership many segments that are concerned with providing services for children. In Alberta, a government-sponsored initiative, despite its grandiose title of The Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children and Families, is making a valiant attempt to integrate judicial, social, educational and health services for children in order to discourage duplication of services at higher costs to the public and to ensure that the needs of children in communities throughout Alberta are met. To this end, working groups in Albertan communities have been invited to provide input to regional Steering Committees who will be responsible for developing a regional plan. The working groups are comprised of volunteer representatives from all sectors of society, including service users and service providers. Based on the premise

that the inhabitants of any particular community

- ***have the best understanding of their local needs for children's and family services***

- ***can play a valuable role in planning and delivering their own children's services***

- ***want responsibility for service for children and families***

(Alberta Commissioner of Services for Children, 1995),

the mission of the working groups was to create a community vision and gather information on the types and current availability of services that children and families need most.

This new proposal for children's services, encompassing a shift from policy fragmentation to policy co-ordination, was initiated in response to public input which "***clearly indicated that a new approach must be child-focused, family centred and community based***" (Alberta Commissioner of Services for Children, 1994, p 9). Four main themes have emerged for final address by the Steering Committees:

1. **Integrated Services:** The needs of the children of Alberta (or throughout the world, for that matter) are diverse and can best be met through a local integrated service plan. Existing funding which is currently distributed to hundreds of agencies and departments would be reallocated for distribution by the directors of the local service plan. The aim of this plan would be to reduce administration costs and channel more funds directly to families to provide the services needed.

2. **Community Delivery:** In recognition of the need for services to be provided directly to the children by the community in which they reside, the government plans to phase out its involvement, by 1997, in the direct delivery of children's services.

3. **Aboriginal Services:** Roughly 50 per cent of the children in Alberta currently receiving government-supported care are aboriginal (Alberta

Family and Social Services, 1995). In order to ensure the availability of effective and culturally sensitive services for these children, the action plan proposes that Aboriginal communities assume responsibility for planning and delivering services to meet the needs of Aboriginal children.

4. Focus on Early Intervention: This focus is, perhaps, the most exciting of the four, since its intent is to provide assistance to 'at-risk' families as early as possible and in a proactive way in order to avoid serious and future problems. The proposal to increase early intervention programmes assumes a significant reduction in the number of children who may require care outside the family in residential facilities, foster homes, correctional centres or group homes. The further assumption is that ***"effective early intervention programming will reduce the overall costs of providing children's services***" (Alberta Commissioner of Services for Children, 1994, p 11) allowing the savings in these areas to be redirected to continuing early intervention programmes.

The final intent of the integrated services plan is to promote a working partnership between children, their families and their communities in order to provide a collaborative, co-ordinated approach to meeting their needs.

Partnerships between schools and the business sector are becoming increasingly common, not only in terms of providing financial assistance and technology information and equipment. A different kind of partnership, one between two sectors of society that have traditionally worked in isolation, has recently made an appearance in Alberta. The Alberta Government Telephone (AGT) company approached the public school board in the city of Calgary with a proposal to establish a kindergarten through year three school in the city centre building that housed its employees. The proposal included the opportunity for other non-AGT employees that worked in the city centre to enrol their children in the school.

In recognising the need for increased family time and parent involvement in education, the Calgary public school board accepted the AGT proposal, stressing their belief that ***"... helping employees balance the commitments of work and family may reduce stress and increase job satisfaction"*** (Campbell, 1995, p. 62). The responsibilities of the school board include staffing, providing the government prescribed curriculum and administration, whilst AGT provides the facility and undertook all the needed renovations.

In addition to the apparent caretaking advantage to the parents of being able to take their children to and from school according to their work schedules, parents, particularly fathers, have the opportunity to be somewhat more intimately involved in the school life of their children. They can establish more personal connections with the teachers and they are able, in this particular situation, to bank their overtime and use it to help out in the classroom, sharing their skills, resources and experience and becoming involved in meaningful and lasting ways. One of the main goals in this partnership is to "...match parents working hours to allow more access to their children in a learning environment" (Campbell, 1995, p 63).

The children stand to gain just as much in such a partnership. The obvious advantage is the increased involvement of their parents. As well, they are able to see a relationship between the world of work and schooling. Retired AGT employees help in the classroom, supervise the children during the lunch hour and guide the children on tours of the building and other AGT working sites. The city centre site of their

school allows the children access to an extensive campus: public libraries, the zoo, the science centre, the planetarium, museum and centre for the performing arts and recreational facilities are all close at hand. These offer excellent field trip opportunities with the added bonus of hands-on learning through real world connections. Many of these facilities offer site-based classes, which serve to extend the partnership even further.

Workplace schools can offer all of the elements of quality early years provision discussed in Section IV, with an increased emphasis on parent involvement, strengthened and supported by employers. The Alberta AGT school is just one example of partnerships between education and business. Many other partnership models exist. For example, on-site day care centres, longer maternity leaves for both parents, flexi-time working arrangements that modify a typical 'nine to five' job, job sharing and 'parent days' that provide more opportunities for parents to visit and volunteer in their children's classrooms are all gaining in popularity in the United States (Boyer, 1992).

Clearly, businesses are beginning to heed the importance of parent involvement in the education of their children, just as schools are beginning to recognise the importance of business in education. Public sector cutbacks in education grants already point to business/school partnerships as the wave of the future, but as Barlow (1995) stresses, these partnerships should proceed with caution. In return for facilities, funding and state of the art technology (including human resources and hardware), schools may eventually have to accept a business mandated curriculum. Predictions for future outcomes of school/business

partnerships (Barlow, 1996) include custom-made learning materials developed by corporations specifically for use in schools supported by corporate funds and/or a possible loss of autonomy of teachers as schools sign contracts with businesses which mandate teacher requirements.

It appears that many businesses are willing to enter into partnerships in education, and for these businesses, the perceived benefits may include the ideological allegiance of young people as business attempts to influence the environment, the economy and the role of government. But the possibility exists of some negative consequences as well. Such partnerships will provide easy access to young consumers in educational settings, thereby commercialising the classroom and, perhaps, robbing childhood to make consumers of the future. One recent example of this in Alberta is the offer, to schools, of free television cable subscription to children's news programmes-the catch is that schools must agree to have the children watch the commercial breaks which are interspersed throughout the news programmes.

The Early Childhood Initiatives Programme (described briefly in Section I, Chapter Two), which began in the summer of 1993 in New Brunswick, is similar to the Children's Services Initiative in Alberta, but clearly concentrates on early intervention. This initiative is a co-ordinated effort, involving several agencies, to diagnosis and identify children, who may be 'at risk' of failure when they enter school, as early as possible In many cases, pre-natal interventions are carried out with the involvement of medical personnel, health agencies and the families concerned. Post-natal support may continue with the addition

of social services personnel and focus on such interventions as nutrition programmes, home visits, well child clinics, day care services and subsidies. Services for children who may be visually or hearing impaired from birth include itinerant specialist teachers who carry out assessments and home visits and advise staff in pre-school settings on programming needs for particular children.

When children are approximately three years of age, pre-school screenings are available and the results of these may necessitate referrals to appropriate agencies or services that can provide support for the identified needs of the child and the family. Support continues as the child enters kindergarten, which, although voluntary at this point in time (1996), is, nonetheless, fully funded by the provincial government. At this point, school district personnel play an important role in co-ordinating the various agencies and services that are involved with children and in ensuring that the transition to the school system is done in the best interests of the child.

It appears that this government espouses an ideology that identifies integrated child care programmes as one component of early intervention. The initiative is an integrated, holistic approach by the New Brunswick government's Public Health Department, Family and Community Social Services, Mental Health Commission, Department of Income Assistance and Ministry of Education in recognition of their belief in early intervention. The initiative clearly takes the needs of children into account. Publicly funded nursery provision that is monitored for quality could take this initiative one step further and

ensure that very young children have every opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

Britain

One of the British initiatives in effective early intervention is based in Bristol. Since it was becoming evident that many children of these young mothers were experiencing developmental delays in the early years, the Bristol Child Development Programme is a project focussed on offering support for teenage mothers and attempting to develop a partnership long before the children begin schooling. Hudson and Ineichen (1991) suggest that, although these mothers are recent recipients of parenting themselves, they may not be mature enough to actually transfer those skills to their own situations. In fact, it may not only be a matter of maturity, but, in many cases, the parenting they received themselves may not have prepared them to be appropriate models and nurturers of their own children. These young mothers often come from disruptive families and so, even if they were reasonably mature, may not have had adequate parenting models in their own lives.

The Bristol Child Development Programme has identified two major reasons for the poor development of some babies with teenaged mothers. First, since young mothers may not have had good eating habits themselves, either as a result of inadequate experiences in their own upbringing or because of insufficient understanding of the needs of a baby, these babies often suffer from a lack of proper nutrition. Second, these babies often experience a lack of stimulating play that can affect their development. Hudson and Ineichen suggest that

maternal instincts about play and stimulation are not necessarily natural. Young mothers need to develop self-confidence. Just learning about child development in school and parenting classes does not necessarily instil the confidence to put that new knowledge into practice.

The Bristol Child Development Programme focusses on the pre-school child's development and the undeveloped capacity of the mother to foster it. Although not denying the social structural factors in a child's development, the quality of parenting has been identified by the Bristol Programme as a key factor in early problems. The Programme truly promotes the concept of early intervention as it attempts to provide parent support very early on. Young mothers are linked with health visitors who provide support and information about early cognitive, social and language development and nutrition to assist them in developing parenting skills. The intent is to build up the mothers' confidence and sense of achievement, thereby bolstering their self-confidence and empowering them to become more involved in enhancing their children's development.

The main results of the programme have been positive (Hudson and Ineichen, op cit.). The young mothers have shown an increase in parental responsibility for their children in the areas of general health, nutrition and language, cognitive and social development. The incidence of child abuse in the programme families has decreased due to an increased understanding by the mothers of their potential as effective parents. Although the results of the programme are positive, there continues to be a need for more comprehensive and co-ordinated

services that would provide continuity for these young mothers and their children as they move through the pre-school years. In order to provide opportunities for the optimal development of teenage mothers and their babies, co-ordination of services from the ministries of Health, Education and Social Services is sorely needed.

In Wales, a similar attempt to forge early partnerships is the Link-Up programme offered by many schools in Mid Glamorgan for children before they begin nursery school. This programme is meant to ease the transition from home to nursery and, in the words of a teacher from Mid Glamorgan, to provide opportunities ***'for getting to know the parents before the child starts school, building up mum's trust in the school and building up the child's confidence that something nice and friendly goes on in this big noisy building'***.

The Link-Up programmes are generally located in schools that have the space and resources to support them. Parents must attend with the children and actively participate in the activities that occur. In fact, where funding is not available to employ qualified nursery nurses, parent volunteers are encouraged to set up the equipment and run the programme themselves, although school personnel take an active part in facilitating the programmes. Those programmes that are able to staff the Link-Up programmes with nursery teachers or nursery nurses attempt to teach the parents skills that they can use at home. For example, as much as telling stories and singing familiar nursery songs are for the enjoyment of the children, the Link-Up leaders also use these to model to parents how they, too, can read and sing to their children. Whilst the children are playing with the large equipment or

manipulatives, the Link-Up leaders demonstrate language interactions, asking questions and responding to initiations by the children.

The Link-Up leaders observe the children as they play and interact with their parents and each other. Feedback is provided to the parents in order to help them understand how young children develop. As the head teacher of one Mid Glamorgan school offering a Link-Up programme explained ***'The whole idea of Link-Up is that there is this bridge between home and school.'***

The fact that programmes such as those described above are available is clearly a recognition that changes in society have necessitated changes in provision for young children and their families. But these programmes must be offered with a guarantee of quality. This can be accommodated with a governmental system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision. The EEL Project (Bertram and Pascal, 1995), discussed in Chapter 8, offers an example of a tool for evaluating the quality of early childhood provision.

Partnerships are vital in the education of today's children. The continuance and strengthening of parent/school partnerships is becoming more commonplace throughout the world. Business/school partnerships are emerging, but, as previously cautioned in this chapter, schools should be wary of any hidden agendas that businesses may bring to such partnerships. If education ensures careful negotiation and clear delineation of responsibilities that consider the needs of the children as the utmost priority, such a partnership can be beneficial to both parties.

The most effective partnerships that will prepare children for the 21 century are clearly those that begin with a holistic view of the child, that are monitored for quality and developmental appropriateness and that integrate all the available community components which provide services designed to meet the complex needs of the children and their families. As Evans (1995a, p 141) stresses:

'It is clear that the problems are more than can be handled adequately by education systems working alone: a coherent, systems orientation is needed. The implication of such an approach requires the development of new arrangements which may cut across existing departmental or ministerial boundaries and budgets.'

Schools, families, community services and business must work together ***'... placing the child and not the system at centre stage'*** (Evans, 1995b, p 27). Only with such an integrated approach can all children, and especially those 'at risk', be assured of educational provision that will maximise their progress and enhance their chances of success in the future.

Section V: Conclusion

The teachers' responses to the surveys, the interviews and the 'perception checks' have all been discussed (in Chapter 8) within the context of their own perceptions and the research that supports much of what they have said. The questions proposed at the beginning of this thesis have been answered by teachers who are involved in and committed to the education and care of young children.

First, despite some cultural and administrative differences between Britain and Canada, and despite the range of teaching experiences and educational backgrounds, the early years teachers in both these countries show a great deal of similarity in their attitudes and beliefs about the essential nature of high quality early childhood education and care. The link between the teachers in Canada and Britain is provided by their

> ***'... shared belief that young children deserve the very best start in life and that quality experiences are grounded in an understanding of the ways in which young children grow, learn and develop and in a genuine liking for, commitment to, them and their families'*** (Abbott, 1994, p 3)

The changes in the lives of children and their families, discussed throughout this study, have, the teachers indicated, affected, in many cases, the opportunities for the essential learning that occurs in the early years.

Second, in the perceptions of the teachers, early learning does matter and it clearly remains an important foundation for children's later learning. This was apparent in all the survey responses. In addition, the teachers who were interviewed expressed strong views on the importance of and opportunity for learning in the early years.

' Well, as far as we can say...I think that the children benefit so much socially. Learning to play together, to co-operate, to share things, learning to be independent... giving them experiences maybe that they wouldn't have outside school. And affirm (sic) ***the language and vocabulary for particular experiences. I just feel that they do gain so much from early years education... but we have to offer them a whole range of experiences... that they wouldn't have otherwise.'*** (teacher, Mid Glamorgan)

'I feel that their early learning experience lays the essential foundation for learning that comes later...they need a very strong foundation... and to me this is their foundation. And through the type of programming I have described (activity-based learning which encourages, for example, exploration, discovery, prediction and stimulates language development, social development and reading skills) ***...teaching takes place and you're facilitating the child for a lot of discovery learning ... we are responsible to teach, but in an appropriate manner and in a meaningful way to those children. It's not a zoo. I always tell the parents that I work with them. My philosophy is that the teacher works with the parents for the sake of the child.*** (teacher, New Brunswick)

In addition to the opportunities for social development, language development and meaningful experiences which may enhance children's learning, teachers noted the impact of early learning on later outcomes in learning and life.

Finally, teachers identified actual components of early childhood programmes that appeared, in their perceptions, to make a significant

contribution to the quality of the programmes. Teachers indicated both in the survey and in the interviews that parent involvement and education was of the utmost importance. They recognise and appreciate the contibutions that parents make, particularly to the development of self-esteem, communication skills and with the provision of meaningful experiences. Partnerships, teachers said, including first and foremost, parent partnerships, are an essential element of quality early years provision. In addition, they noted, setting appropriate goals, ensuring developmentally appropriate activities are provided, using appropriate assessment strategies and ensuring that teachers are offered appropriate pre-service and in-service educational opportunities are components that will contribute to quality early childhood programmes.

The evidence is clear in the historical roots of early childhood education, in accumulative and conclusive findings in past and current research and in the perceptions of teachers, that is, that early childhood education matters and has a powerful impact on later school development. The teachers who participated in the survey and the interviews acknowledge the societal changes that have had an effect on children's learning. They firmly believe that quality early childhood education and experiences provide an important base on which to build future learning and that changes in the educational provision of very young children must occur in order to meet their changing needs. Although it is clear, from their responses, that teachers feel the most

important factor in the early years is the involvement of parents in their children's learning experiences, they also spoke of the need for commitment to 'quality' programmes, to universal access, to adequate government funding, and to partnerships in education.

In addition to taking teachers' perceptions into account, society cannot deny the continuing influence of the philosophers, writers and educators of the past. Their legacy is firmly embedded in a philosophy that focusses on how children learn. The potential for learning that occurs in the early years has changed, in the sense that many children see, hear, touch, taste and smell much more than they ever did before. Their experiences have broadened because of the rapid advances in technology which have resulted in easier access to sensory experiences. As stated earlier in this thesis, educational policy and curriculum development due to societal, economical and technological change is inevitable. The developers of such policy and curriculum must examine the evidence that clearly indicates the need for high quality, universally accessible education and care in the early years.

Children cannot demand, nor can they bring about high quality early childhood education. Parents can advocate for their children and they can demand high quality programmes, but they cannot implement them single-handedly. Teachers can heed the research evidence and their own perceptions of the needs of young children and their families, but neither can they implement high quality programmes alone. These stakeholders, and others, require the philosophical and financial support of policy makers if high quality early childhood programmes

are to be universally accessible to the children who will in turn become the policy makers, workers and citizens of the future.

Within the context of the history of early childhood education, research and effective practice and teachers' perceptions, I have touched upon several issues that are important, in my perception, to 'the way forward' for early childhood education. These issues, whilst they arise out of the discussion surrounding quality early childhood education, clearly affect the development of policy in early childhood education. The following issues, supported by history, research and practising teachers, are worthy of consideration in the development of early childhood educational policy in most countries.

Education and Care

Changes in social and economic need, in social structures, in the nature of childhood and in patterns of migration all point to a greater need for efficiency and the ability to target resources when education and care are seen as essential components of each other. As more mothers, traditionally the care givers in the home, join the workforce either for personal satisfaction or economic reasons, the need for an extensive system of child care will necessarily become more widespread throughout the world. However, education, particularly if it is surrounded by a rigid, non child-sensitive curriculum should not press down upon pre-school provision and care. It is crucial that policy implementation takes account of developmentally appropriate practice.

'Quality' in early childhood programmes is the educational 'buzz' word. But, as I have stated earlier in this thesis, quality is difficult to define

and depends upon many variables, not least of which are the values, culture and tradition of the society in question. In the USA each year, approximately eight million children between three and five years of age now enrol in some form of child-care or kindergarten. It is the ***"quality of this experience (which) will consequentially shape a child's readiness for school, especially the disadvantaged."*** (Boyer, 1991, p 47). Boyer further notes, in his 1992 study, that high quality child care was ranked as very important by kindergarten teachers and that elementary teachers frequently stressed the vital importance of good pre-school. Zigler (in Boyer, 1991, p57), one of the founders of Head Start in the USA, argued that every child could benefit from good child care and early education and that an effective child-care system must become ***"part of the very structure of our society".*** Quality child-care must merge with pre-school education in the 'seamless' provision for children in a changing world.

Funding

Failure at school is disproportionately reflected in different groups of citizens. Whilst the variables affecting educational outcomes are considerable, it is evident that there are poor and disadvantaged groups in all societies who need support. Nowhere is the support more crucial than in the critical early years of life. Funding decisions, which effectively allocate or alter life chances cannot, in all good conscience, be left to the whims of the politicians who are keen to make drastic financial cuts without paying attention to research evidence. The current trend in Europe - and elsewhere - is to see the balance between harmonious socialisation and the learning of skills as crucial. Whether these are taken as complementary to family life, or as a highly

necessary supplement for survival, is not important. The point is that all children benefit, the disadvantaged especially so, such that clear lines of funding, however derived, have to be equitably available.

It is important to address issues such as the proportions of funding currently devoted to different levels of public education. Traditional dispositions of such funds may no longer be tenable. It is no longer enough to provide partial or minimal funding for early years programmes. Any government aspiring to compete in a global economy and the global society must accept responsibility for ensuring that the youngest members of their society are provided with quality opportunities to develop to their maximum potential.

Access

This issue concerns the often uneven distribution and provision of quality care and pre-school education in some countries. This is a bit like playing 'musical chairs' with the futures of young children. As Barlow (1996) said ***'When the music stops, there won't be a place for all.***' Since it is no longer possible to totally separate work and family life, access to high quality, affordable, safe and convenient care in the early years is of the utmost importance. There is a need to provide care, not only full-time during traditional day-time working hours, but part-time as well to accommodate shift work. Additionally, low-income and single parent families often cannot afford full-time care. Such families may need to be involved in job preparation classes, or go to interviews which require sporadic or temporary support from day-care services. Co-operation and creative thinking on the part of all stakeholders (government, parents, educators, business and industry)

are required if problems associated with universal access to quality care for children are to be solved.

It appears that many continental European countries, looking to the future, place a high value on the importance of early childhood education and care and endeavour to ensure access to sufficiently funded nursery and pre-school education for children as young as two years of age. Countries such as France, Belgium, Italy and Denmark have achieved high levels of provision (over 80%, Parliamentary Briefing for Welsh Members of Parliament, 1993). In addition, France and Belgium provide tax relief on childcare costs for children under six years of age (Dolan, 1994). In Italy, state schools are required by law to remain open for at least eight hours each day (Dolan, 1994) in recognition of parents need for provision of high quality care and education whilst they attend to their jobs.

The world in which our children live today is much more technologically complex than that of our own childhood. The complexity will most certainly increase as today's children enter adulthood and bring their own children into the world. In this sense, the provision of quality care and pre-school education must, of necessity, be universally accessible.

Teacher Education and Training

In teacher education there is an undeniable tension between theory (usually what is taught within the training institution) and practice (what appears to work with children in school). Early years teachers need both 'propositional knowledge', that is the principles, theories and

descriptions of, for instance, how children's cognition develops, and also 'non-propositional' knowledge, that is the action-experience which comes from trying out the interactions with the child and constantly adjusting to the feedback (Munby and Russell, 1990).

Both extensive theory and practice seem vital in training personnel for the provision of high quality care and education. As stated in Chapter 12, theory is no substitute for practice - nor practice for theory. Whilst issues concerning the balance and relationship between theory and practice are generally common to all systems of initial teacher education, most countries appear to see them as necessary supporters of each other. Some modes of training, such as those proposed by the British government, are 'at odds' with much going on in other European countries. Many countries are currently engaged in up-grading and lengthening their training of personnel. Such training is increasingly embedded in higher education; and its professional, 'reflective' base is of considerable concern to those aware of the need for independent thinking in future generations of citizens. Fundamental values are reflected in the attitudes policy-makers display towards modes of educating and training early years personnel.

The levels and depth of teacher education are improving in many countries, but there is still a great deal of variation in training available for caregivers. Consultation and research lead one to the inescapable conclusion that continuity and articulation should exist between the education and training of care-givers and the education and training of teachers. Not only should there be opportunities available for continuous professional development for care-givers, but, perhaps,

opportunities for experienced care-givers to 'add-on' education and training so that they could become certificated pre-school and kindergarten teachers.

If, in fact, if we believe in programme continuity for children's education, in universal access to pre-school programmes and in careful transitions from one level of education to the next, then it is only appropriate that teachers and caregivers in all stages of the child's education be given the same opportunities for continuity, access and transition in their own preparations for developing high quality programmes that are appropriate to the needs of the children.

Outcomes

There is an **abundance** of research evidence (Bryant and Ramey, 1987; Fuerst and Fuerst, 1993; Slavin et al., 1993; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1994; Sylva, 1994a; Fuerst and Petty, 1996) on the importance of early years education. Policy makers need to become more aware of this. The research that is now accumulating throughout the world supports the belief that carefully provided, high quality kindergarten and care has a lasting impact on the course of a child's life. Such research, especially that undertaken more recently, is extremely congruent. Outcomes, not simply couched in terms of immediate academic success, are emphasised in terms of social and economic values. These need to be more clearly seen as **long-term** and concerned with the changing nature of childhood and of society. Considerable evidence now exists which indicates that early childhood education is particularly effective for children who may be disadvantaged, socially, emotionally, physically or cognitively.

Sylva (1994a), in a detailed review of research in this field for Start Right, (Ball, 1994), suggests that many, especially politicians, appear sceptical and say there is insufficient evidence.

"Unfortunately," she comments, "few are aware that the more rigorous research of the 80s and 90s has shown lasting benefits of pre-school education which are far more important than IQ scores. Results of the early studies have not been overturned, i.e. the IQ results were not proved wrong: we have discovered that the benefits of early learning appear in 'life-skills', social and economic outcomes rather than in tests of formal intelligence". (Sylva, 1994, p 8).

In all, Sylva's review of research reached the following conclusions:-

- ***that most of the research "has shown that pre-school education leads to immediate, measurable gains in educational and social development.***

- ***the most rigorous studies show that high quality early education leads to lasting cognitive and social benefits in children which persist through adolescence and adulthood."*** (Sylva, op cit., p 94).

One of the mainstays of the research evidence most commonly cited throughout the English-speaking world is clearly that of the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Study. The 27-year follow-up study of the participants in the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Project suggests ***"that for each dollar spent on high quality pre-school programs, society gains $7 down the road in higher tax contributions and lower expenditures on remedial education, welfare and the criminal justice system"*** (Fiske, 1992, p 101). Although some policy makers continue to deny the conclusiveness of such evidence, others argue for and support early childhood education either as a means of providing

equitable access for the poor to programmes that the rich can easily buy, or in long-term cost-benefits to the country. Whether advocated for reasons of social justice or social planning, it is clear that policy makers must acknowledge early childhood education as an important foundation to the development of future, responsible citizens.

Research

Policy makers are often apt to underestimate and/or disregard the evidence resulting from long and short-term educational research projects. Although many countries are eager to encourage such projects, and, in fact, to provide financial support for researchers' endeavours, others are slow to recognise the value in research and its impact upon policy development. For example, the reality of the educational cuts in Alberta, by the current (1996) conservative government, has meant that funding for an adequate infrastructure at universities in Alberta is fast becoming scarce, posing a threat, both to academic staff and to students, to continuing their critical research in the field of education.

Research in the field of education is no less important than that, for instance, in the fields of medicine, information technology or agriculture. As we change and progress in a society that is becoming increasingly more global, complex and diverse in political, economic and educational matters, continued research provides the evidence for effective and innovative developments and improvements in educational programming. Continuing research will provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence of the needs of children in their educational journeys. Such research may be funded in some countries

by charitable trusts and private sponsors. But in other countries where such avenues of funding do not exist, educational research can only be effective with the support, financial and otherwise, of government departments that are concerned with educational provision.

Moss and Pence (1994, p 177) stress the need for research that examines ***'quality perspectives based on a recognition and understanding of cultural, environmental and social diversity'*** and urge researchers ***'to expand their efforts to understand parents' perspectives, adding to this the perspective of workers in early childhood services to create a more comprehensive conception of quality.'***

There are other issues that need addressing, such as the move towards co-ordination and integration of services for children and their families (Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Moss and Pence, 1994; OECD, 1995; Siraj-Blatchford, 1995) and the move towards multi-professional training (National Commission on Education, 1993; Abbott and Rodger, 1994; Gammage, 1995a), but the ones I have presented above have all been touched upon by the teachers in the study and, as I have stated, are worthy of consideration (in the perceptions of practicing early years teachers in Alberta, New Brunswick, Nottinghamshire and Mid Glamorgan) by early childhood education policy makers.

It is evident that many of the conceptual and structural issues in early childhood education are interrelated and that policy concerns in countries throughout the world are remarkably similar. It is also evident that properly designed early childhood provision pays society

handsomely. Since parents often are not in a position to provide the appropriate support and educational provision for their children and since it is society as a whole which reaps the rewards of such provision, it is only fitting that governments provide the necessary funds to support quality early childhood programmes. Above all, it is vital that the problems of definition, responsibility and values for early childhood education be properly addressed by systematic analysis, research and more informed political awareness.

Ball (1994, p 72) came to the following conclusion:

'...- pre-school education leads to immediate, measurable gains in educational and social development and lasting cognitive and social benefits in children - provided it is of high quality. While all children benefit, the impact of early education is strongest in children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The most important learning in pre-school education is to do with aspiration, motivation and self-esteem. ... (and) Investment in high-quality and effective early education provides a worthwhile social and economic return to society in both developing and developed countries.'

Today's challenge is for everyone concerned with early childhood education and care to work towards establishing high quality provision, with support from local **and** global partnerships which include, not only parents, children, teachers and administrators, but community agencies, businesses, universities and government. Our children will need both to compete and to co-operate in a global society. In order to promote children's learning to the fullest and encourage them to be creative problem solvers and responsible citizens, countries, which for the most part share common values and philosophies about the importance of pre-school provision and care, must share their ideas,

innovations, and research, and work towards a common purpose: that is, investing in children and their education as an investment in the future.

Finally, inspired by a Welsh teacher's response to the importance of early childhood education, a quote from Comenius, the seventeenth century educator who stressed the obligation of the state to provide compulsory education, including kindergarten:

'Let the first foundation of all things be thoroughly laid unless you wish the whole superstructure to totter."

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PERCEPTION CHECK

SCHOOL "READINESS" QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION I - Please provide the following general information on the make-up of your class:

1. Teaching experience_____years

2. University degree(s) _____

diploma(s)_____

3. Class size_____children

4. Please indicate the type of class that you teach

		Age range of the children
Kindergarten	_____	_____
Year 1	_____	_____
Multi-age	_____	_____

5. How many children in your class come from families where both

parents work outside the home during the day?_____

SECTION II- Please provide your perceptions on the following questions with regards to "readiness skills".

1. What generally do you consider to be "readiness skills" for children

entering your class?_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you believe that the majority of the children in your class have entered school with these skills?

Yes_____ No_____

2.1 If not, which of the skills that you have identified in Question 1

above, do you see as lacking?_____

_____

_____

_____

2.2 Can you attribute this lack to anything in particular?_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Please list the readiness assessment tools that you use?

_____

_____

_____

4. Additional comments you may wish to make regarding "readiness

skills".

SECTION III- Please rate the following areas of child development with regards to the overall make-up of your class. If you believe development in a particular area is a serious problem, please place an X at the SERIOUS end of the scale:

eg. SERIOUS PROBLEM :_x_:__:__:__:__:NOT A PROBLEM

Conversely, if you do not believe that it is a problem, please mark the NOT A PROBLEM. Use the intermediate points if your perceptions are less extreme.

SERIOUS PROBLEM	NOT A PROBLEM
1.Language development	:__:__:__:__:__:
2. Emotional maturity	:__:__:__:__:__:
3. General knowledge	:__:__:__:__:__:
4. Social Confidence	:__:__:__:__:__:
5. Moral awareness	:__:__:__:__:__:
6. Physical well-being	:__:__:__:__:__:

SECTION IV- Ernest Boyer, in his book, Ready to Learn, has suggested the following strategies for improving school success. Please rate your perceptions of these along the scale as VERY IMPORTANT or NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL

	VERY IMPORTANT NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL
1. Improve parent education	:__:__:__:__:__:
2. Decrease television viewing	:__:__:__:__:__:
3. Provide funding for pre-school (nursery-school) programs	:__:__:__:__:__:
4. Improve the quality of health services for mothers & children	:__:__:__:__:__:
5. Involve neighbourhoods and communities in education	:__:__:__:__:__:
6. Provide workplace policies that will allow more parent involvement in schools	:__:__:__:__:__:
7. Other (please explain) _____	:__:__:__:__:__:

SECTION V- Please add any other comments that you believe are important with regards to ensuring school success through early intervention.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your time and input. Both are very much appreciated. If you are interested in being contacted for an extended interview by telephone, please provide the following information:

Name_____ School_____

Telephone number School_____ Home_____

City/Town_____

Teacher Interview Questions

From current political issues:

1. Do you see any effects of maternal employment on the children who enter your classroom?
(lack in nursery rhyme knowledge, social skills, separation anxiety, etc.)

2. Do you support government funding for pre-school for 2-4 year old children?

3. What problems do you see arising due to government cutbacks in funding for early education?

From RSA report:

1. Does early learning matter?

2. What is the nature of good teaching practice?

3. How can a universal entitlement to good early learning be provided?

Any other thoughts on early years education?

PERCEPTION CHECK LETTER

Dear

Time has passed rather quickly since you kindly consented to an interview with me in order to gather information for my Ph.D. thesis. As you will remember, I am completing a research degree at the University of Nottingham. The submitted title of the thesis is Comparative Trends in Early Childhood Education: Perceptions, Problems and Possibilities. In preparation for the final submission, I would like to ensure that I have interpreted your comments correctly.

You are one of 24 teachers interviewed, 12 in Canada and 12 in Britain. In addition to the more specific questions that I asked of you all, additional, common themes emerged from the interviews. I have summarised the general perceptions regarding those. Please indicate whether or not you agree with my interpretations and add further comments as you feel the need clarify, enhance or reword.

Question 1: Do you see any effects of maternal employment on the children who enter your classroom?

Most of the interviewed teachers indicated that maternal employment appeared to have an effect on children, particularly in the area of communication skills. Teachers who did not find any particular effects qualified their perceptions. Some felt that 'professional' parents' understood the need for quality time with their children. Another qualifying perception was that daycare experiences often enhanced some of the developmental skills of the children.

Question #2: Do you support government funding for pre-school for 2-4 year old children?

In response to this question, teachers were almost unanimous in their convictions that governments should provide funding for nursery programmes. The interviewed teachers firmly believe that quality

nursery provision can offer a chance for children, particularly those who may be 'at risk', to experience opportunities for growth in all the areas of development, but most especially in language.

Question #3: What problems do you see arising due to government cutbacks in funding for early years education?

Most of the interviewees were concerned with the loss of early intervention opportunities should governments reduce funding in the early years. Alberta teachers, particularly (although they have the support of some of their colleagues in New Brunswick and Nottinghamshire), were convinced that a two-tiered system could develop. This would result in further widening of the already visible gap between children from families that would be able to afford early educational provision for their children before they began compulsory schooling and those that would not.

Teachers were also concerned about the greater expenses that would be incurred in later years of schooling, as schools tried to compensate for the loss of developmental opportunities in the early years. They continued to stress the importance of language development in the early years and how it would be adversely affected if governments reduced funding in early childhood education. Some teachers felt that funding cuts could result in larger class sizes and parents being required to pay high tuition fees.

This question did not appear to be of such concern to the Mid Glamorgan teachers, perhaps because their LEA does fund nursery provision. These teachers appeared satisfied that the LEA recognised the benefits of early years programmes, particularly as an early intervention strategy, and would continue to do so even if funds were not forthcoming from the government.

Question #4: Does early learning matter?

Teachers unanimously agreed that early learning is important. All teachers interviewed expressed strong views on the importance and opportunity for learning in the early years. Half of the respondents indicated that learning in the early years formed the important foundation for all later learning.

Question #5: What is the nature of good teaching practice?

All the teachers from Mid Glamorgan, New Brunswick and Alberta indicated, in one way or another, that good practice meant developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. The interviewees all appeared to be aware of the elements of a developmentally

appropriate curriculum, elements addressing, amongst other things, appropriate assessment, the importance of play in activity based programmes, parent involvement, partnerships, language development and making meaning of the world.

Five of the six Nottinghamshire teachers agreed with the other interviewees. A tape malfunction with the sixth resulted in the loss of the interview portion which addressed this issue.

Question #6: How can a universal entitlement to high quality early learning be provided?

Most teachers responded that government funding is the major stumbling block and agreed that governments must that politicians must see early learning as a priority and adequately fund programmes and provision in the early years. They must come to realise the benefits of the optimum learning that occurs in the early years and increase early years funding particularly to lower pupil/teacher ratios and to increase resources. Several teachers indicated that government standards for nurseries in both countries are currently problematic.

Additional, common, themes emerged from the interviews. As well as discussing perceptions which were directly related to the above questions, most teachers focused, on the importance of such issues as early intervention, self-esteem, parental involvement and partnerships and a developmentally appropriate curriculum, including the importance of play in the education of young children.

Please feel free to comment further on these issues, as well as the above questions, should you so wish. You are welcome to attach additional paper as needed.

In addition to clarifying my interpretations of your comments, please indicate your perceptions of the meanings of the following concepts in relation to early childhood programming for children between the ages of 2 1/2 and eight years.

1. Quality in programme provision:

2. Readiness:

3. Cognitive skills:

I would appreciate a response in the enclosed, addressed, stamped envelope by February 25. Please be assured, as before, that you will not be identified in the compilation of the information with which you provide me.

Please indicate if you are interested in publication sources if, once I complete the requirements for the Ph.D., portions are accepted for publication. Thank you for your continuing support.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

SECTION 1

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE		
	#	%
0-7 YEARS	71	25.72
8-15 YEARS	83	30.07
16 + YEARS	122	44.20
TOTAL	276	100.00

TABLE 1

DEGREE AND DIPLOMA INFORMATION		
	#	%
NO DEGREE	78	28.26
HAVE DEGREE	189	68.48
MASTERS	9	3.26
TOTAL	276	100.00
NO DIPLOMA	120	43.48
HAVE DIPLOMA	156	56.52
TOTAL	276	100.00

TABLE 2

SECTION 1

CLASS SIZE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	3	1.09
0-18	44	15.94
19-25	131	47.46
> 25	98	35.51
TOTAL	276	100.00

TABLE 3a

CLASS TYPE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	0.72
NURSERY	30	10.87
KINDERGARTEN/RECEPTION	82	29.71
0-7 YEARS	69	25.00
8-15 YEARS	13	4.71
16 + YEARS	80	28.99
TOTAL	276	100.00

TABLE 3b

PROGRAM LENGTH

	#	%
NO ANSWER	85	30.80
FULL DAY	125	45.29
HALF	66	23.91
TOTAL	276	100.00

TABLE 3c

SECTION 1

WORKING PARENTS BY COUNTY AND PROVINCE

	#	%
ALBERTA	111	51.75
NEW BRUNSWICK	35	55.97
MID GLAMORGAN	39	33.92
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	91	37.49
TOTAL	276	

TABLE 4

SECTION 2

QUESTION 1 - SOCIAL SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	56	38.36%	UNIMPORTANT	32	24.62%
IMPORTANT	90	61.64%	IMPORTANT	98	75.38%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	44	39.64%	UNIMPORTANT	11	28.21%
IMPORTANT	67	60.36%	IMPORTANT	28	71.79%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	12	34.29%	UNIMPORTANT	21	23.08%
IMPORTANT	23	65.71%	IMPORTANT	70	76.92%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 5a

QUESTION 1 - EMOTIONAL SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	77	52.74%	UNIMPORTANT	46	35.38%
IMPORTANT	69	47.26%	IMPORTANT	84	64.62%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	61	54.95%	UNIMPORTANT	14	35.90%
IMPORTANT	50	45.05%	IMPORTANT	25	64.10%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	16	45.71%	UNIMPORTANT	32	35.16%
IMPORTANT	19	54.29%	IMPORTANT	59	64.84%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 5b

SECTION 2

QUESTION 1 - COGNITIVE SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	28	19.18%	UNIMPORTANT	28	21.54%
IMPORTANT	118	80.82%	IMPORTANT	102	78.46%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	18	16.22%	UNIMPORTANT	5	12.82%
IMPORTANT	93	83.78%	IMPORTANT	34	87.18%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	10	28.57%	UNIMPORTANT	23	25.27%
IMPORTANT	25	71.43%	IMPORTANT	68	74.73%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 5c

QUESTION 1 - PHYSICAL SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	103	70.55%	UNIMPORTANT	100	76.92%
IMPORTANT	43	29.45%	IMPORTANT	30	23.08%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	76	68.47%	UNIMPORTANT	27	69.23%
IMPORTANT	35	31.53%	IMPORTANT	12	30.77%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
UNIMPORTANT	27	77.14%	UNIMPORTANT	73	80.22%
IMPORTANT	8	22.86%	IMPORTANT	18	19.78%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 5d

QUESTION 2 - MAJORITY OF CHILDREN HAVE SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.37%	NO ANSWER	5	3.85%
YES	106	72.60%	YES	79	60.77%
NO	38	26.03%	NO	46	35.38%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	1	0.90%	NO ANSWER	1	2.56%
YES	80	72.07%	YES	11	28.21%
NO	30	27.03%	NO	27	69.23%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	1	2.86%	NO ANSWER	4	4.40%
YES	26	74.29%	YES	68	74.73%
NO	8	22.86%	NO	19	20.88%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 6

QUESTION 2.1 - LACKING SOCIAL SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	115	78.77%	NOT LACKING	103	79.23%
LACKING	31	21.23%	LACKING	27	20.77%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	90	81.08%	NOT LACKING	31	79.49%
LACKING	21	18.92%	LACKING	8	20.51%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	25	71.43%	NOT LACKING	72	79.12%
LACKING	10	28.57%	LACKING	19	20.88%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 7a

QUESTION 2.1 - LACKING EMOTIONAL SKILLS

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	122	83.56%	NOT LACKING	87	66.92%
LACKING	24	16.44%	LACKING	43	33.08%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	94	84.68%	NOT LACKING	22	56.41%
LACKING	17	15.32%	LACKING	17	43.59%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	28	80.00%	NOT LACKING	65	71.43%
LACKING	7	20.00%	LACKING	26	28.57%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 7b

QUESTION 2.1 - LACKING COGNITIVE

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	94	64.38%	NOT LACKING	86	66.15%
LACKING	52	35.62%	LACKING	44	33.85%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	71	63.96%	NOT LACKING	13	33.33%
LACKING	40	36.04%	LACKING	26	66.67%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	23	65.71%	NOT LACKING	73	80.22%
LACKING	12	34.29%	LACKING	18	19.78%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 7c

QUESTION 2.1 - LACKING PHYSICAL

	CANADA			BRITAIN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	134	91.78%	NOT LACKING	120	92.31%
LACKING	12	8.22%	LACKING	10	7.69%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA			MID GLAMORGAN	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	102	91.89%	NOT LACKING	35	89.74%
LACKING	9	8.11%	LACKING	4	10.26%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK			NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	
	#	%		#	%
NOT LACKING	32	91.43%	NOT LACKING	85	93.41%
LACKING	3	8.57%	LACKING	6	6.59%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 7d

QUESTION 2.2 - LACK ATTRIBUTED TO

CANADA

	#	%
NO COMMENT	74	50.68%
PARENT INTERACTION	42	28.77%
LATE BIRTHDAY	10	6.85%
READINESS AT HOME	6	4.11%
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	4	2.74%
TOO MUCH TV	4	2.74%
LOW SES	5	3.42%
CAREGIVER SELF-ESTEEM	1	0.68%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO COMMENT	62	47.69%
PARENT INTERACTION	35	26.92%
LATE BIRTHDAY	1	0.77%
READINESS AT HOME	11	8.46%
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	1	0.77%
TOO MUCH TV	12	9.23%
LOW SES	8	6.15%
CAREGIVER SELF-ESTEEM	0	0.00%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO COMMENT	57	51.35%
PARENT INTERACTION	35	31.53%
LATE BIRTHDAY	10	9.01%
READINESS AT HOME	2	1.80%
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	2	1.80%
TOO MUCH TV	3	2.70%
LOW SES	2	1.80%
CAREGIVER SELF-ESTEEM	0	0.00%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO COMMENT	10	25.64%
PARENT INTERACTION	17	43.59%
LATE BIRTHDAY	0	0.00%
READINESS AT HOME	1	2.56%
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	1	2.56%
TOO MUCH TV	6	15.38%
LOW SES	4	10.26%
CAREGIVER SELF-ESTEEM	0	0.00%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO COMMENT	17	48.57%
PARENT INTERACTION	7	20.00%
LATE BIRTHDAY	0	0.00%
READINESS AT HOME	4	11.43%
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	2	5.71%
TOO MUCH TV	1	2.86%
LOW SES	3	8.57%
CAREGIVER SELF-ESTEEM	1	2.86%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO COMMENT	52	57.14%
PARENT INTERACTION	18	19.78%
LATE BIRTHDAY	1	1.10%
READINESS AT HOME	10	10.99%
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	0	0.00%
TOO MUCH TV	6	6.59%
LOW SES	4	4.40%
CAREGIVER SELF-ESTEEM	0	0.00%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 8

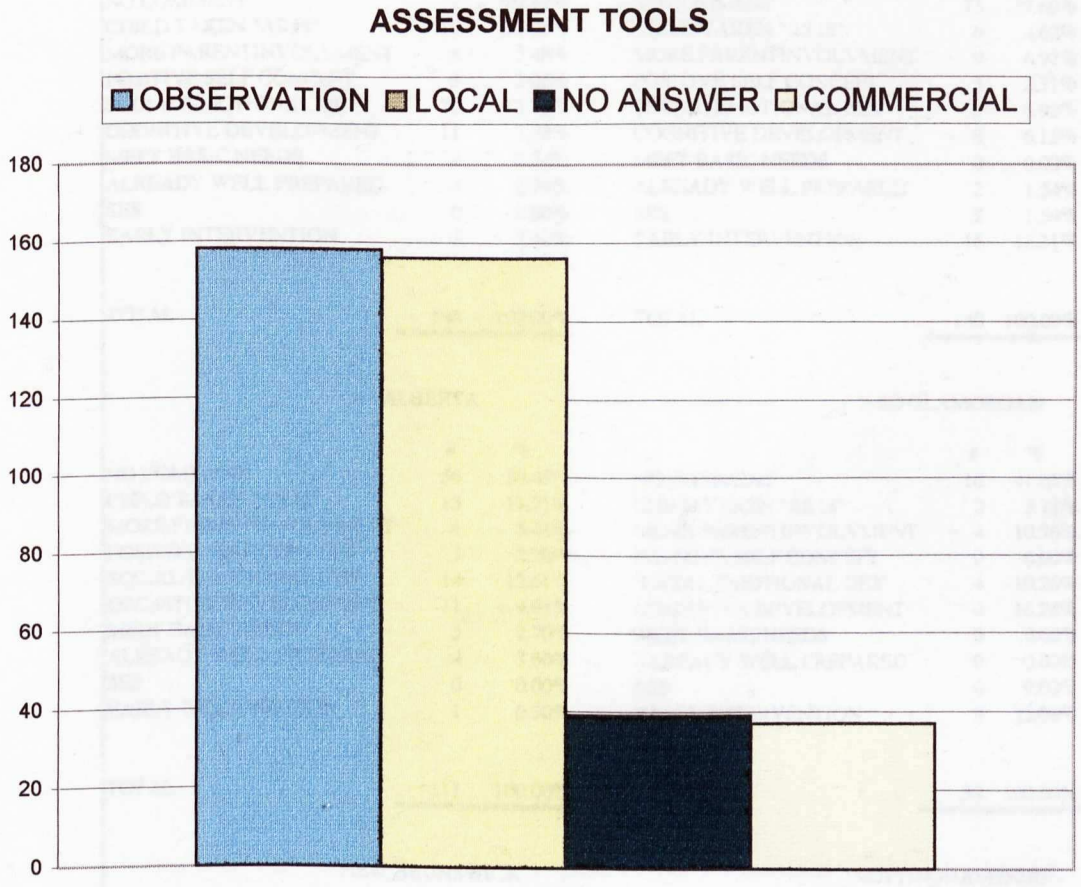
ASSESSMENT TOOLS
OBSERVATION
LOCAL
NO ANSWER
COMMERCIAL
180
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0

TABLE 9

QUESTION 4 - OTHER COMMENTS

CANADA

	#	%
NO COMMENT	72	49.32%
CHILD TAKEN "AS IS"	19	13.01%
MORE PARENTINVOLVMENT	8	5.48%
POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT	3	2.05%
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEV	20	13.70%
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	11	7.53%
MEET BASIC NEEDS	4	2.74%
ALREADY WELL PREPARED	4	2.74%
SES	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION	5	3.42%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO COMMENT	75	57.69%
CHILD TAKEN "AS IS"	6	4.62%
MORE PARENTINVOLVMENT	9	6.92%
POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT	3	2.31%
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEV	9	6.92%
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	8	6.15%
MEET BASIC NEEDS	0	0.00%
ALREADY WELL PREPARED	2	1.54%
SES	2	1.54%
EARLY INTERVENTION	16	12.31%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO COMMENT	56	50.45%
CHILD TAKEN "AS IS"	13	11.71%
MORE PARENTINVOLVMENT	6	5.41%
POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT	3	2.70%
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEV	14	12.61%
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	11	9.91%
MEET BASIC NEEDS	3	2.70%
ALREADY WELL PREPARED	4	3.60%
SES	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION	1	0.90%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO COMMENT	16	41.03%
CHILD TAKEN "AS IS"	2	5.13%
MORE PARENTINVOLVMENT	4	10.26%
POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT	0	0.00%
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEV	4	10.26%
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	4	10.26%
MEET BASIC NEEDS	0	0.00%
ALREADY WELL PREPARED	0	0.00%
SES	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION	9	23.08%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO COMMENT	16	45.71%
CHILD TAKEN "AS IS"	6	17.14%
MORE PARENTINVOLVMENT	2	5.71%
POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT	0	0.00%
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEV	6	17.14%
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	0	0.00%
MEET BASIC NEEDS	1	2.86%
ALREADY WELL PREPARED	0	0.00%
SES	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION	4	11.43%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO COMMENT	59	64.84%
CHILD TAKEN "AS IS"	4	4.40%
MORE PARENTINVOLVMENT	5	5.49%
POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT	3	3.30%
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEV	5	5.49%
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	4	4.40%
MEET BASIC NEEDS	0	0.00%
ALREADY WELL PREPARED	2	2.20%
SES	2	2.20%
EARLY INTERVENTION	7	7.69%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 10

SECTION 3

QUESTION 1 - LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

CANADA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.37%
SERIOUS 1	10	6.85%
2	26	17.81%
3	39	26.71%
4	35	23.97%
NOT SERIOUS 5	34	23.29%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.54%
SERIOUS 1	21	16.15%
2	34	26.15%
3	26	20.00%
4	19	14.62%
NOT SERIOUS 5	28	21.54%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%
SERIOUS 1	8	7.21%
2	23	20.72%
3	27	24.32%
4	27	24.32%
NOT SERIOUS 5	24	21.62%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	10	25.64%
2	15	38.46%
3	7	17.95%
4	4	10.26%
NOT SERIOUS 5	3	7.69%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	2	5.71%
2	3	8.57%
3	12	34.29%
4	8	22.86%
NOT SERIOUS 5	10	28.57%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	2.20%
SERIOUS 1	11	12.09%
2	19	20.88%
3	19	20.88%
4	15	16.48%
NOT SERIOUS 5	25	27.47%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 11a

QUESTION 2 - EMOTIONAL MATURITY

CANADA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	3	2.05%
SERIOUS 1	6	4.11%
2	26	17.81%
3	50	34.25%
4	45	30.82%
NOT SERIOUS 5	16	10.96%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.54%
SERIOUS 1	9	6.92%
2	30	23.08%
3	35	26.92%
4	31	23.85%
NOT SERIOUS 5	23	17.69%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%
SERIOUS 1	6	5.41%
2	23	20.72%
3	38	34.23%
4	30	27.03%
NOT SERIOUS 5	12	10.81%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	3	7.69%
2	9	23.08%
3	17	43.59%
4	7	17.95%
NOT SERIOUS 5	3	7.69%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO ANSWER	1	2.86%
SERIOUS 1	0	0.00%
2	3	8.57%
3	12	34.29%
4	15	42.86%
NOT SERIOUS 5	4	11.43%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	2.20%
SERIOUS 1	6	6.59%
2	21	23.08%
3	18	19.78%
4	24	26.37%
NOT SERIOUS 5	20	21.98%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 11b

SECTION 3

QUESTION 3 - GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

CANADA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.37%
SERIOUS 1	2	1.37%
2	21	14.38%
3	43	29.45%
4	44	30.14%
NOT SERIOUS 5	34	23.29%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.54%
SERIOUS 1	15	11.54%
2	29	22.31%
3	33	25.38%
4	24	18.46%
NOT SERIOUS 5	27	20.77%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%
SERIOUS 1	2	1.80%
2	19	17.12%
3	33	29.73%
4	34	30.63%
NOT SERIOUS 5	21	18.92%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	7	17.95%
2	14	35.90%
3	13	33.33%
4	3	7.69%
NOT SERIOUS 5	2	5.13%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	0	0.00%
2	2	5.71%
3	10	28.57%
4	10	28.57%
NOT SERIOUS 5	13	37.14%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAM

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	2.20%
SERIOUS 1	8	8.79%
2	15	16.48%
3	20	21.98%
4	21	23.08%
NOT SERIOUS 5	25	27.47%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 11c

QUESTION 4 - SOCIAL CONFIDENCE

CANADA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	3	2.05%
SERIOUS 1	4	2.74%
2	15	10.27%
3	45	30.82%
4	55	37.67%
NOT SERIOUS 5	24	16.44%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.54%
SERIOUS 1	7	5.38%
2	13	10.00%
3	41	31.54%
4	32	24.62%
NOT SERIOUS 5	35	26.92%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%
SERIOUS 1	3	2.70%
2	12	10.81%
3	36	32.43%
4	41	36.94%
NOT SERIOUS 5	17	15.32%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	2	5.13%
2	7	17.95%
3	15	38.46%
4	9	23.08%
NOT SERIOUS 5	6	15.38%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO ANSWER	1	2.86%
SERIOUS 1	1	2.86%
2	3	8.57%
3	9	25.71%
4	14	40.00%
NOT SERIOUS 5	7	20.00%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	2.20%
SERIOUS 1	5	5.49%
2	6	6.59%
3	26	28.57%
4	23	25.27%
NOT SERIOUS 5	29	31.87%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 11d

SECTION 3

QUESTION 5 - MORAL AWARENESS

CANADA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.37%
SERIOUS 1	9	6.16%
2	24	16.44%
3	37	25.34%
4	51	34.93%
NOT SERIOUS 5	23	15.75%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	5	3.85%
SERIOUS 1	13	10.00%
2	27	20.77%
3	35	26.92%
4	30	23.08%
NOT SERIOUS 5	20	15.38%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%
SERIOUS 1	8	7.21%
2	18	16.22%
3	28	25.23%
4	40	36.04%
NOT SERIOUS 5	15	13.51%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	5.13%
SERIOUS 1	8	20.51%
2	12	30.77%
3	11	28.21%
4	4	10.26%
NOT SERIOUS 5	2	5.13%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	1	2.86%
2	6	17.14%
3	9	25.71%
4	11	31.43%
NOT SERIOUS 5	8	22.86%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	3	3.30%
SERIOUS 1	5	5.49%
2	15	16.48%
3	24	26.37%
4	26	28.57%
NOT SERIOUS 5	18	19.78%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 11e

QUESTION 6 - PHYSICAL WELLBEING

CANADA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.37%
SERIOUS 1	10	6.85%
2	16	10.96%
3	34	23.29%
4	42	28.77%
NOT SERIOUS 5	42	28.77%
TOTAL	146	100.00%

BRITAIN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.54%
SERIOUS 1	4	3.08%
2	14	10.77%
3	20	15.38%
4	30	23.08%
NOT SERIOUS 5	60	46.15%
TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%
SERIOUS 1	6	5.41%
2	14	12.61%
3	26	23.42%
4	35	31.53%
NOT SERIOUS 5	28	25.23%
TOTAL	111	100.00%

MID GLAMORGAN

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	1	2.56%
2	7	17.95%
3	8	20.51%
4	10	25.64%
NOT SERIOUS 5	13	33.33%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK

	#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	4	11.43%
2	2	5.71%
3	8	22.86%
4	7	20.00%
NOT SERIOUS 5	14	40.00%
TOTAL	35	100.00%

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

	#	%
NO ANSWER	2	2.20%
SERIOUS 1	3	3.30%
2	7	7.69%
3	12	13.19%
4	20	21.98%
NOT SERIOUS 5	47	51.65%
TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE11f

SECTION 4

QUESTION 1 - PARENT EDUCATION

	CANADA		BRITAIN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	1	0.68%	NO ANSWER	2	1.54%
SERIOUS 1	112	76.71%	SERIOUS 1	97	74.62%
2	24	16.44%	2	21	16.15%
3	8	5.48%	3	9	6.92%
4	0	0.00%	4	1	0.77%
NOT SERIOUS 5	1	0.68%	NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA		MID GLAMORGAN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	1	0.90%	NO ANSWER	1	2.56%
SERIOUS 1	84	75.68%	SERIOUS 1	34	87.18%
2	18	16.22%	2	2	5.13%
3	7	6.31%	3	1	2.56%
4	0	0.00%	4	1	2.56%
NOT SERIOUS 5	1	0.90%	NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK		NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%	NO ANSWER	1	1.10%
SERIOUS 1	28	80.00%	SERIOUS 1	63	69.23%
2	6	17.14%	2	19	20.88%
3	1	2.86%	3	8	8.79%
4	0	0.00%	4	0	0.00%
NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%	NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 12a

QUESTION 2 - TV VIEWING

	CANADA		BRITAIN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	3	2.05%	NO ANSWER	1	0.77%
SERIOUS 1	68	46.58%	SERIOUS 1	43	33.08%
2	37	25.34%	2	29	22.31%
3	34	23.29%	3	46	35.38%
4	4	2.74%	4	6	4.62%
NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%	NOT SERIOUS 5	5	3.85%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA		MID GLAMORGAN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	3	2.70%	NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
SERIOUS 1	53	47.75%	SERIOUS 1	20	51.28%
2	28	25.23%	2	5	12.82%
3	25	22.52%	3	13	33.33%
4	2	1.80%	4	1	2.56%
NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%	NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK		NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%	NO ANSWER	1	1.10%
SERIOUS 1	15	42.86%	SERIOUS 1	23	25.27%
2	9	25.71%	2	24	26.37%
3	9	25.71%	3	33	36.26%
4	2	5.71%	4	5	5.49%
NOT SERIOUS 5	0	0.00%	NOT SERIOUS 5	5	5.49%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 12b

SECTION 4

QUESTION 3 - FUNDING PRE-SCHOOL

	CANADA		BRITAIN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	4	2.74%	NO ANSWER	3	2.31%
IMPORTANT 1	63	43.15%	IMPORTANT 1	113	86.92%
2	30	20.55%	2	10	7.69%
3	27	18.49%	3	2	1.54%
4	16	10.96%	4	1	0.77%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	6	4.11%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	1	0.77%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA		MID GLAMORGAN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	4	3.60%	NO ANSWER	2	5.13%
IMPORTANT 1	48	43.24%	IMPORTANT 1	36	92.31%
2	25	22.52%	2	0	0.00%
3	19	17.12%	3	0	0.00%
4	11	9.91%	4	0	0.00%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	4	3.60%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	1	2.56%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK		NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%	NO ANSWER	1	1.10%
IMPORTANT 1	15	42.86%	IMPORTANT 1	77	84.62%
2	5	14.29%	2	10	10.99%
3	8	22.86%	3	2	2.20%
4	5	14.29%	4	1	1.10%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	2	5.71%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	0	0.00%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 12 c

QUESTION 4 - IMPROVING HEALTH SERVICES

	CANADA		BRITAIN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	6	4.11%	NO ANSWER	4	3.08%
IMPORTANT 1	54	36.99%	IMPORTANT 1	35	26.92%
2	36	24.66%	2	35	26.92%
3	39	26.71%	3	41	31.54%
4	9	6.16%	4	10	7.69%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	2	1.37%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	5	3.85%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA		MID GLAMORGAN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	5	4.50%	NO ANSWER	3	7.69%
IMPORTANT 1	39	35.14%	IMPORTANT 1	13	33.33%
2	30	27.03%	2	9	23.08%
3	29	26.13%	3	10	25.64%
4	6	5.41%	4	1	2.56%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	2	1.80%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	3	7.69%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK		NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	1	2.86%	NO ANSWER	1	1.10%
IMPORTANT 1	15	42.86%	IMPORTANT 1	22	24.18%
2	6	17.14%	2	26	28.57%
3	10	28.57%	3	31	34.07%
4	3	8.57%	4	9	9.89%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	0	0.00%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	2	2.20%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 12 d

SECTION 4

QUESTION 5 - COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

	CANADA		BRITAIN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	3	2.05%	NO ANSWER	1	0.77%
IMPORTANT 1	63	43.15%	IMPORTANT 1	51	39.23%
2	46	31.51%	2	37	28.46%
3	27	18.49%	3	31	23.85%
4	4	2.74%	4	7	5.38%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	3	2.05%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	3	2.31%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA		MID GLAMORGAN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	2	1.80%	NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
IMPORTANT 1	42	37.84%	IMPORTANT 1	22	56.41%
2	38	34.23%	2	6	15.38%
3	23	20.72%	3	8	20.51%
4	3	2.70%	4	1	2.56%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	3	2.70%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	2	5.13%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK		NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	1	2.86%	NO ANSWER	1	1.10%
IMPORTANT 1	21	60.00%	IMPORTANT 1	29	31.87%
2	8	22.86%	2	31	34.07%
3	4	11.43%	3	23	25.27%
4	1	2.86%	4	6	6.59%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	0	0.00%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	1	1.10%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 12e

QUESTION 6 - WORKPLACE POLICIES

	CANADA		BRITAIN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	5	3.42%	NO ANSWER	1	0.77%
IMPORTANT 1	51	34.93%	IMPORTANT 1	45	34.62%
2	53	36.30%	2	39	30.00%
3	30	20.55%	3	38	29.23%
4	6	4.11%	4	4	3.08%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	1	0.68%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	3	2.31%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

	ALBERTA		MID GLAMORGAN		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	5	4.50%	NO ANSWER	0	0.00%
IMPORTANT 1	35	31.53%	IMPORTANT 1	16	41.03%
2	41	36.94%	2	12	30.77%
3	26	23.42%	3	10	25.64%
4	3	2.70%	4	0	0.00%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	1	0.90%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	1	2.56%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

	NEW BRUNSWICK		NOTTINGHAMSHIRE		
	#	%		#	%
NO ANSWER	0	0.00%	NO ANSWER	1	1.10%
IMPORTANT 1	16	45.71%	IMPORTANT 1	29	31.87%
2	12	34.29%	2	27	29.67%
3	4	11.43%	3	28	30.77%
4	3	8.57%	4	4	4.40%
NOT IMPORTANT 5	0	0.00%	NOT IMPORTANT 5	2	2.20%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 12f

SECTION 5

OTHER COMMENTS FOR SUCCESS

CANADA	#	%	BRITAIN	#	%
NO COMMENT	71	48.63%	NO COMMENT	75	57.69%
EFFECTS OF REDUCED SERVICES	19	13.01%	EFFECTS OF REDUCED SERVICES	6	4.62%
MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HOME	8	5.48%	MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HOME	9	6.92%
CONSISTENCY IN STAFF EXPECTATIONS	3	2.05%	CONSISTENCY IN STAFF EXPECTATIONS	3	2.31%
PARTNERSHIPS	20	13.70%	PARTNERSHIPS	9	6.92%
SCHOOL USED AS A DAYCARE	11	7.53%	SCHOOL USED AS A DAYCARE	8	6.15%
CLASSROOM ASSISTANCE	4	2.74%	CLASSROOM ASSISTANCE	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION ASAP	4	2.74%	EARLY INTERVENTION ASAP	2	1.54%
PARENT EDUCATION	0	0.00%	PARENT EDUCATION	2	1.54%
IMPROVE SELF CONCEPT	5	3.42%	IMPROVE SELF CONCEPT	16	12.31%
MORE STRUCTURED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	1	0.68%	MORE STRUCTURED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	0	0.00%
TOTAL	146	100.00%	TOTAL	130	100.00%

ALBERTA	#	%	MID GLAMORGAN	#	%
NO COMMENT	56	50.45%	NO COMMENT	16	41.03%
EFFECTS OF REDUCED SERVICES	13	11.71%	EFFECTS OF REDUCED SERVICES	2	5.13%
MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HOME	6	5.41%	MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HOME	4	10.26%
CONSISTENCY IN STAFF EXPECTATIONS	3	2.70%	CONSISTENCY IN STAFF EXPECTATIONS	0	0.00%
PARTNERSHIPS	14	12.61%	PARTNERSHIPS	4	10.26%
SCHOOL USED AS A DAYCARE	11	9.91%	SCHOOL USED AS A DAYCARE	4	10.26%
CLASSROOM ASSISTANCE	3	2.70%	CLASSROOM ASSISTANCE	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION ASAP	4	3.60%	EARLY INTERVENTION ASAP	0	0.00%
PARENT EDUCATION	0	0.00%	PARENT EDUCATION	0	0.00%
IMPROVE SELF CONCEPT	1	0.90%	IMPROVE SELF CONCEPT	9	23.08%
MORE STRUCTURED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	0	0.00%	MORE STRUCTURED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	0	0.00%
TOTAL	111	100.00%	TOTAL	39	100.00%

NEW BRUNSWICK	#	%	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	#	%
NO COMMENT	15	42.86%	NO COMMENT	59	64.84%
EFFECTS OF REDUCED SERVICES	6	17.14%	EFFECTS OF REDUCED SERVICES	4	4.40%
MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HOME	2	5.71%	MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HOME	5	5.49%
CONSISTENCY IN STAFF EXPECTATIONS	0	0.00%	CONSISTENCY IN STAFF EXPECTATIONS	3	3.30%
PARTNERSHIPS	6	17.14%	PARTNERSHIPS	5	5.49%
SCHOOL USED AS A DAYCARE	0	0.00%	SCHOOL USED AS A DAYCARE	4	4.40%
CLASSROOM ASSISTANCE	1	2.86%	CLASSROOM ASSISTANCE	0	0.00%
EARLY INTERVENTION ASAP	0	0.00%	EARLY INTERVENTION ASAP	2	2.20%
PARENT EDUCATION	0	0.00%	PARENT EDUCATION	2	2.20%
IMPROVE SELF CONCEPT	4	11.43%	IMPROVE SELF CONCEPT	7	7.69%
MORE STRUCTURED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	1	2.86%	MORE STRUCTURED KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	0	0.00%
TOTAL	35	100.00%	TOTAL	91	100.00%

TABLE 13

NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY LIBRARY